MR. EEE CONDUCTS A TOUR By DON WILCOX

fantastic ADVENTURES

ECEMBER 20c

DEATH PLAYS A GAME

by DAVID V. REE

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A "back-seat driver" gets your goat . . . *but*

INFECTIOUS DANDRUFF

gets it faster!

START NOW WITH LISTERINE!

WHAT makes the infectious type of dandruff so annoying, so distressing, are those troublesome flakes on collar or dress . . . and the scalp irritation and itching . . . that so often accompany the condition.

If you're troubled in this way, look out—you may have this common form of dandruff, so act now, before it gets worse.

Has Helped Thousands

Start right in with Listerine Antiseptic and massage. This is the medical treatment that has shown such amazing results in a substantial majority of clinical test cases . . . the treatment that has also helped thousands of other people.

You, too, may find it as helpful as it is delightful. Listerine is so easy, so simple to use, and so stimulating! You simply douse it on the scalp morning and night and follow with vigorous and persistent massage.

Thousands of users have marvelled at how flakes and scales begin to disappear, how much cleaner and healthier their scalps appear. And remember:

Kills "Bottle Bacillus"

Listerine Antiseptic kills millions of germs on scalp and hair, including Pityrosporum ovale, the strange "Bottle Bacillus" recognized by many outstanding dandruff specialists as a causative agent of infectious dandruff.

This germ-killing action, we believe, helps to explain why, in a series of tests, 76% of dandruff sufferers showed either complete disappearance of or marked improvement in the symptoms of dandruff within a month.

LAMBERT PHARMACAL CO., *St. Louis, Mo.*

The Treatment

MEN: Douse full strength Listerine on the scalp morning and night.

WOMEN: Part the hair at various places, and apply Listerine Antiseptic right along the part with a medicine dropper, to avoid wetting the hair excessively.

Always follow with vigorous and persistent massage with fingers or a good hairbrush. Continue the treatment so long as dandruff is in evidence. And even though you're free from dandruff, enjoy a Listerine massage once a week to guard against infection. Listerine is the same antiseptic that has been famous for more than 50 years as a mouth wash and gargle.

Accepted for Good Housekeeping Bureau

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Are You HAUNTED by FEARS like these?

Suppose I am drafted! How can I become more than a private?

Will I stick in this same low pay job another 3 years?

Bills! Bills! Will I ever be more than one jump ahead of the sheriff?

Will a machine be invented that will wipe out my job?

My job will be too tough ten years from now--what then?

Is there a way out for me? What can I do?

Where or how can I make more money?

You know that LOW PAY is at the bottom of nearly all fears that haunt a man's future. You know too that it takes specialized ability to get into the higher pay brackets. If fear of the future haunts you—if you can't see in the years ahead, security, freedom from money worries, here's an answer to "How can I acquire specialized ability?" Risk a postcard—find out what Radio offers.

Learn at Home to Make up to $50 a Week as a Radio Technician

Here is a quick way to more pay. Radio offers the chance to make $5, $10 a week extra in spare time a few months from now. There is an increasing demand for full time Radio Technicians and Radio Operators, too. Many make $30, $40, $50 a week. On top of a large civilian demand for Radios, the Radio industry is getting millions of dollars in Defense Orders. Clip the coupon below and mail it. Find out how I train you for good pay in Radio.

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Over 800 broadcasting stations in the U. S. employ thousands of Radio Technicians with *average pay among the country's best paid industries.* Repairing, servicing, selling home and auto Radio receivers (there are over 50,197,000 in use) gives good jobs to thousands. Many other Radio Technicians take *advantage of the opportunities to have their* own service or retail Radio businesses. Think of the many good pay jobs in connection with Aviation, Commercial, Police Radio and Public Address Systems. N. R. I. gives you the required knowledge of Radio for these jobs. N. R. I. trains you to be ready when Television opens new jobs. Yes, Radio Technicians make good money because they use their heads as well as their hands. They must be trained.

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Nearly every neighborhood offers opportunities for a good part-time Radio Technician to make extra money fixing Radio *sets. I give* you special training to show you how to start cashing in on these opportunities early. You get Radio parts and instructions for building test equipment, for conducting experiments that give you valuable practical experience. You also get a modern Professional Radio Servicing Instrument. My fifty-fifty method —half working with Radio parts, half studying my lesson texts—makes learning Radio at home interesting, fascinating, practical.

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J. E. SMITH, President
Dept. 1MM,
National Radio Institute
Washington, D. C.

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VOL. 3
NO. 10

Fantastic ADVENTURES

TRADE MARK REGISTERED

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FANTASTIC ADVENTURES DECEMBER, 1941

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VOLUME 3, NUMBER 10

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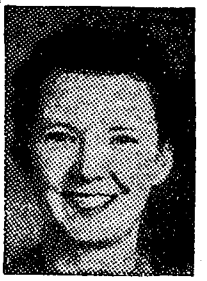

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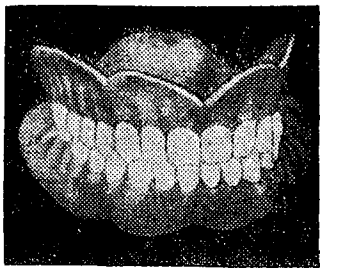

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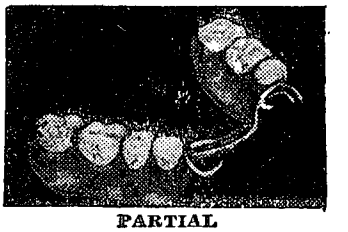

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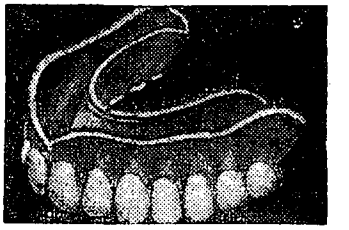

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"I Talked with God"

(Yes, I Did—Actually and Literally)

and as a result of that little talk with God a strange Power came into my life. After 42 years of horrible, dismal, sickening failure, everything took on a brighter hue. It's fascinating to talk with God, and it can be done very easily once you learn the secret. And when you do — well — there will come into your life the same dynamic Power which came into mine. The shackles of defeat which bound me for years went a-shimmering—and now—?—well, I own control of the largest daily newspaper in our County, I own the largest office building in our City, I drive a beautiful Cadillac limousine. I own my own home which has a lovely pipe-organ in it, and my family are abundantly provided for after I'm gone. And all this has been made possible because one day, ten years ago, I actually and literally talked with God.

You, too, may experience that strange mystical Power which comes from talking with God, and when you do, if there is poverty, unrest, unhappiness, or ill-health in your life, well — this same God-Power is able to do for you what it did for me. No matter how useless or helpless your life seems to be — all this can be changed. For this is not a human Power I'm talking about—it's a God-Power. And there can be no limitations to the God-Power, can there? Of course not. You probably would like to know how you, too, may talk with God, so that this same Power which brought me these good things might come into your life, too. Well — just write a letter or a post-card to Dr. Frank B. Robinson, Dept. 970, Moscow, Idaho, and full particulars of this strange Teaching will be sent to you free of charge. But write now — while you are in the mood. It only costs one cent to find out, and this might easily be the most profitable one cent you have ever spent. It may sound unbelievable — but it's true, or I wouldn't tell you it was. — Advt. Copyright, 1939, Frank B. Robinson.

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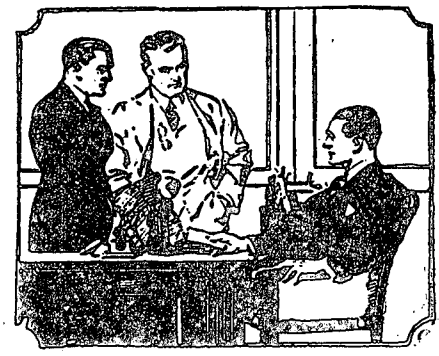

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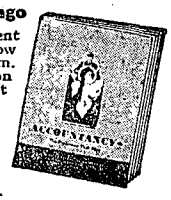

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The Editor's Notebook

A CONFIDENTIAL CHAT WITH THE EDITOR

IT'S a hard job for a mere pulp-paper editor to classify a truly great story, and that's why we were sort of stumped to place David V. Reed's story in this issue in its proper place. We knew it was a lead-novel, but was it Fantastic, or Amazing?

It is, we believe, truly representative of both because it lives up to the requirements for both, which seems to be an achievement. However, we present it to you now, not in either guise, but simply as "a helluva good story!"

BUT that isn't all. By some stroke of great good fortune, this issue is unique. It has not one "great" story, but *three!* Your editor has, during the past four years, kept in mind the titles of certain stories each month or each issue; the story he considers the best, and the one the readers say is best.

Usually, the readers and we agree on this story. However, this issue, we are putting down the names of three authors as having penned a story worthy of an anthology. They are Reed, mentioned above, Don Wilcox, and Robert Moore Williams.

Wilcox's "Mr. Eee Conducts A Tour" is one you will find raising gooseflesh on your scalp, because it's so unusually good.

And Williams' "The Reformation Of Joseph Reed" is one of those yarns that Williams writes once a year. It elevates him once every twleve months to the "genius" level. This is his month to display genius!

IN short, with this issue, we hand you, not a pulp magazine, but an anthology of the best fantasy ever presented in a monthly publication. Even your editor is excited!

ROD RUTH, who is rapidly taking his place as a leading science fiction author, has quite a bit of his work in this issue. We want to know what you think of it, cover and interiors.

PERHAPS it will interest many of you to know that the January issue (on sale November 7) of our sister magazine, *Amazing Stories,* will constitute a treat to those of you who like your stories in a scientific vein as well as fantastic. This issue will be a "double" issue, with 96 extra pages, and 60,000 words of extra fiction. Which means that it will contain a total of 130,000 words. The reason for it all is probably to wish you all a Happy New Year. But whatever the reason, don't miss it!

"Now, Professor, please tell me what earthly good this new x-ray machine is anyway."

McCAULEY has painted another "Mac Girl" which we'll run very soon. Your favorite author, William P. McGivern is hard at work writing a story to go with it.

ON the opposite page you will find the names of the winners in our contest to tell the Martian his right hand.

Your editors were very gratified at the results of this contest, and the number of entries. And we're sure that if one of our writers gets himself into such a situation in a story again, we'll know how to get him out.

BEFORE some prowling sleuth comes along and reveals the amazing secret that Ned Hadley, your newest artist, who did that marvelous illustration for Don Wilcox's story in this issue, is none other than Julian Krupa in disguise, we'll reveal the truth ourselves. He's Ned Hadley, by golly, and he now works for us because we saw some of his work done for religious papers!

HERE'S good news. Stanton A. Coblentz, who has been writing great fantasy for as long as we can remember, is doing one for *Fantastic Adventures,* a novel which we think will rank

(Concluded on page 67)

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PRIZE CONTEST WINNERS!

Here they are, readers. The winners in our recent story contest. You remember it. Duncan Farnsworth's "Problem On Mars" in our August issue. The problem was to answer the question of the Martian "Which is my right hand?" Here are the names of the readers who answer the Martian in the most direct, simple, and unequivocable way.

First Prize—$50.00

Mrs. L. V. Metcalf,
66 W. Main Street,
Ayer, Mass.

Second Prize—$10.00

Victor Kirkpatrick,
911 Shades Road,
Birmingham, Ala.

Third Prize—$5.00

C. Stanley Knape,
503 E. 17th Street,
Austin, Texas.

HONORABLE MENTIONS

W. J. Hartwick, 420 Cedar Street, Wallace, Idaho.
Pvt. R. L. Robinson, Ward 36, Station Hospital, Camp Shelby, Mississippi.
Donald L. Graham, 159 Broad Street, Grove City, Pennsylvania.
Herman S. Weiss, Apt. 2, 403 Dinwiddie Street, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania.
D. E. O'Conner, 23 Haskin Street, Springfield, Massachusetts.
Harry Hanly, 1712 Chamberlain Street Chattanooga, Tennessee.
James P. Martin, 7th Co., A. F. S. Det., Fort Knox, Kentucky.
D. F. Bueschel, 22 State Street, Hammond, Indiana.
Paul F. Lindell, *U.S.S. Cormorant,* Navy Yard, Washington, D. C.
Leland Londoner, 510 S. Governor, Iowa City, Iowa.

Here is Mrs. Metcalf's winning letter:

"Picture the panel as the Sun, the point about which our planets move. You are Mars, your own planet. Move in the direction Mars would move in its trip around the Sun. That is right."

Mr. Kirkpatrick said:

"If you were outside of a circle, facing the way your planet turns, your side away from the circle is your right."

Mr. Knape's answer was:

"RIGHT is the direction of the magnetic field established above a wire with an electric current running in the direction away from you. ABOVE is that direction the door by which you entered now bears in relation to you."

* * * * *

WE received a flood of answers to this contest, and with answers that ranged over so wide a field of science (and lack of science) that we were positively amazed. So very many stumbled over the answer that had to do with the location of the Martian's heart. *Perhaps* it was on his left side. Most of the answers left an "if" or a "possibility of an alternative" standing in the way of winning a prize. Mr. Leland Londoner submitted seven correct answers, taking up 23 typewritten (single-space!) pages, with diagrams. But all were too complicated, and both Mars and Earth would have died while the processes were worked out. All in all, however, the contest was undoubtedly our most successful. We'll surely have more. So those of you who didn't win, watch our companion magazine, in the next few months, for a brand new contest, a very clever one, worked out by your favorite author, Don Wilcox. Until then, contestants, keep your pencils sharp! —THE EDITORS.

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A GAME

by DAVID V. REED

Gambling ships in space are an evil, but a Lindite game ship is Horror itself! Aboard one you gamble for your life, not for money!

"NO MORE bets, the wheel is spinning," the croupier said monotonously.

The silver bell in the center of the table began to peal as the four concentric wheels slowed in their spinning. Cary Harper casually leaned over the side of the huge oval gambling table and an easy grin of satisfaction crossed his features. When the last wheel stopped, Harper looked up for a moment. He was amazed when his eyes met the unconcealed hostility that lay in the gaze of the shriveled Martian croupier.

The bell had fallen off to silence.

"Double zero, double black," intoned the croupier quietly. A murmur rose from the other players as the croupier swept clear every square except the one before Harper. He matched the stack of chips that lay on Harper's square, blue for white, and pushed the pile toward him.

He had won again, Harper thought, but somehow an uneasiness came over him. The way the croupier had looked at him, as if after these past two weeks he suddenly knew who Harper was. Not that Harper cared either way. But it shouldn't have made any difference to the croupier, and the cold anger in

Van Horn fought with all his strength, then: "I can't keep it in the air!" he sobbed

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the Martian's eyes had definitely expressed that it did make a difference, that Harper wasn't wanted aboard this ship.

It was this realization that unaccountably sent a thrill through the slender, white-clad figure of Cary Harper. He looked again at the Martian, and suddenly he turned around and stopped.

Directly behind him stood a barrel-chested man of medium size, looking directly into Harper's eyes through thick-lensed glasses. There was a faint smile on the man's lips that seemed to distort his face, as if he wasn't used to smiling, and the experiment was painful.

"Hello, Harper," said Maxwell Green. "Here we are again."

Harper's eyes danced, swiftly surveying the large room. There was a man standing at every doorway.

"You can't do a thing legally," Harper said. "We're in the territorial limits of Tyuio."

Maxwell Green pursed his lips and shook his head in mock sadness.

"Not at the moment," he sighed. "The ship has been cruising all afternoon, and a few minutes ago it passed beyond the hundred mile limit. So it is legal, after all."

Harper looked around again. He was completely confused by the sudden appearance of Green. Where had he come from? Quietly he said:

"You don't mind if I cash these?" and he began scooping the stacks of colored chips into a little sack. Hardly any of the numerous people around them were aware of what was happening; they might have been two friends talking.

He turned around again and said, in a whisper:

"Watch yourself, Max," and even as he spoke he swung the heavy bag squarely into Green's face. Green let out a roar of pain as he fell back and Harper vaulted past him. He was running at full speed toward the nearest door. The man who stood there saw him coming and he braced himself, but the speed, as well as the strangeness, of the attack left him uncertain. He had no time to think. When Harper was three feet away, he suddenly lowered his head and charged into the man like a human battering ram.

The two men flew out of the doorway and hit the deck together. Harper rolled over, took an instant to wallop the man as he came up, and plunged swiftly through the double doors to the outer deck. Immediately he knew that Green had been telling the truth. The ship had cruised away from Tyuio, and the air was too thin for prolonged exposure. He climbed a ladder and ran toward the parking hangar.

Alarm signals were being piped to the crew. Somehow everything seemed in readiness for his capture. One of the hangar attendants was listening to the signals. Harper walked up behind him, tapped him on the shoulder, and laid him out with a short punch that came up from the deck. Then he bent over the hangar control board and punched the button for the lock release, jamming the gear with a heavy iron a second later.

Then he was lost in the maze of private fliers that filled the hangar. Most of the ship's clients preferred their own fliers to the ship's launch for the sake of privacy, but these, Harper knew, would all be locked. He saw what he wanted in a corner—a bright yellow taxiflier. He jumped in, revved the motors, and the plane crawled to the exit track and headed for the lock.

Just as he reached it, Green came running in at the far end, followed by a score of men. Harper cut the motors

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long enough to yell:

"Perfectly legal, Max!" Then he was heading for the great green ball that was the planetoid Tyuio, a hundred miles or so off.

CARY HARPER kept the proceedings perfectly legal by coming in with the meter. He paid the steep tariff that had clicked off, got a receipt from the manager of the taxiflier station, and in response to the manager's questions about the whereabouts of the driver, laughed insanely, challenged the manager to a duel and stalked off muttering an obscure Uranian prayer to himself.

A quarter of an hour later he breezed through the gently bustling lobby of the Rhon-Vhedy Plaza Hotel. He smiled at the girl behind the tobacconist's counter, nodded to one of the assistant managers and quietly called his floor number to the elevator operator. Cary Harper seldom spoke to strangers; a professional gambler had to be careful about his identity and the chief clue to recognition—his voice.

He got off at the fortieth floor and entered his suite. Monte was sitting on the terrace, basking in the warm brilliance of a gold and emerald sun. He squinted up at Harper and drawled:

"I thought you forgot where you lived."

"I almost moved," Harper grinned, sinking into a soft chair and reaching for Monte's drink. "Got some news for you, Monte. Maxwell Green is here in Vhedy."

"So you found out?" Monte said. He was a small, thinnish man with delicate hands and clever, restless eyes, and he fixed his eyes on Harper and scowled. "How did it go?"

"You mean you knew?"

"About a minute too late," Monte nodded. "Just as you left the lobby this morning, I caught sight of Max getting out of a chair and taking off after you. You got into a cab and he took one right behind you. I figured a procession of three cabs might be a little conspicuous, so I laid off." His scowl deepened as he added, "And the way you been acting these last days, I thought maybe you wouldn't want me to find out where you were going. You got secrets all of a sudden."

"It's no secret," Harper shrugged. "Between us?" He hesitated. "Well, maybe one secret . . . for a few more days." Slowly sipping the drink he recounted what had happened aboard the *Venus Sapphire*.

Monte was silent for a while after he had finished. Then he said:

"I don't get it. What's a specialist like you doing on a sucker ship, playing big stakes on the four-wheel? You ain't after the money . . . you got a trade for that, a fat trade."

"Sure," said Harper, grinning again. "Only the money I make that way is ours, and the money I make elsewhere is mine. And because I know you wouldn't approve, I wanted to hold out on you until I was ready."

"I'll take a chance on that," said Monte, his face momentarily relaxing into a smile. "But Max is serious business."

"Possibly. What do you think he's up to?"

"Think? I don't have to think. He's out to get you."

"And how did he know we were here?"

"He tailed us from Church's planet."

"Indeed? A remarkable feat, if true." Harper thoughtfully toyed with the empty glass. "But even so, a prize Colonial I.P. sleuth doesn't come to Tyuio on a manhunt. You're forgetting that this wanderer's paradise provides immunity from the I.P. or any-

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body else. The Tyuionians extradite no one and get no one in return. It's a cinch he can't do anything here."

"You got a bet," said Monte. "A guy with a one-cylinder brain like his is always up to the obvious. He hates you."

"He hates half the world. No, Monte, even a rat like Max wouldn't let his disposition interfere with business."

"Cary Harper is his business."

"Not when there's something bigger around . . . something that even Tyuio outlaws."

"Like what?"

HARPER hesitated before he answered. "Like a Lindite ship. And a hundred thousand bucks as a reward for turning it in."*

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* Lindar, one of the Sander's group of planets, at the outermost reaches of known interstellar space, is the only one of its group to retain any life. Its decades of marauding are directly attributable to the fact that it is dying, and with it, the almost fabled race of Lindites. From this stems the most vicious form of piracy the System has ever known.

Locked by nature to a planet on which scarcely any other life can long survive, the Lindites, of whom less than a thousand are believed to be still alive, found that even their life had become impossible for their small number. They did not have enough people to work their mines, the famed energy mines from which Lindar drew light and heat. There were not enough of them to run their ships, manage their industries, or perform the countless daily tasks necessary to the functioning of a complex civilization. Faced with death, they realized that only the bringing in of fresh blood and stock, new races that would remain subservient to them, could they continue to fight for survival.

The physical nature of Lindar, alas, defeated this end. The terrible atmospheric pressure, the presence of poisonous gases, and the existence of a strange element in its atmosphere, could not be overcome even by the great science of the Lindites. Life for an alien race on Lindar was possible at the most for ten years, hard, miserable years, and then a death so horrible that System Councils early forbade the sentencing of any criminals for any reason to Lindar. Of all System races, only the Jovians and humans were able to exist at all in the delicate, perilously balanced world of Lindar. The small numbers of the Jovians, as well as their predominantly feeble intelligence, precluded them. There remained only the human race, far-flung and numerous throughout the System, as the hope of the Lindites.

Two other factors complicated the task of the Lindites. One was the presence of the strange element in its atmosphere. After even short intervals of residency on Lindar, humans found they could no longer return to the outer world; the strange element had become vital for life. They were forced to remain on Lindar, where they died. The other factor was inherent in the harsh world that Lindar, itself a delicate force, presented to aliens. Strangely enough, as the experiments of the famed Dr. A. A. Kingsley proved, unless humans were thoroughly reconciled to life on Lindar, they could not live at all! So long as they retained the will to leave this strange world of Lindar, or any will at all, they were useless to the Lindites.

The Lindites had early experimented with would-be suicides, for whose families they provided enormous sums of money on the condition that the Lindites would then own the would-be suicides. The experiment brought few humans, and failed too often: frequently the slaves killed themselves as soon as they arrived on Lindar.

Lindar became a pariah, shunned and feared by the world. Only its far distance from the rest of the System proved a consolation. But it was then that the Lindites sent forth their piratical ships, ships that brought back voluntary slaves to work in their dying world. With great cunning, the Lindites played upon one of the most evident weaknesses of humans to gain their ends—gambling!

They sent out a small fleet of ships that outwardly resembled the hosts of gambling and pleasure craft that plied the trade routes of the System. They were gambling ships in every detail . . . but they added the one detail that distinguished Lindite ships from all the rest: they played for money and ended by playing for human lives. This final detail was accomplished by a series of skillful moves which led victims on, ending in the offer of the white globe and the Drink of Honor.

It was then, these last elements, that gave the Lindites the power to bring voluntary slaves to Lindar. The I.P. proved unable to stop the practice completely. Attacks on Lindar were impossible because of their distance and strange armaments, and because their cities were, for the most part, far underground.

In desperation, the I.P. established huge patrols which were fairly successful. In addition, they posted a standing reward of one hundred thousand dollars in interplanetary currency for aid in the apprehension of Lindite ships. They were but infrequently claimed, and . . . —(Condensed from Prof. Karl Worth's: *"A History of the Outer World and Lindar,"* pp. 604-655.—Ed.

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"Are you kidding?" said Monte. "There hasn't been a report of a Lindite ship in two years."

"That doesn't mean there haven't been any operating for two years, does it?" Harper said. "They're only reported by accident, you know." He smiled at Monte's elaborate gesture of boredom. "Okay," he agreed, "it sounds screwy. But remember that time we were working that Jovian moon settlement? Remember how things kept falling off, and then they discovered a Lindite ship had been in the vicinity?"

"So?"

"These last two weeks have been lousy," said Harper. "And I mean progressively lousy. It's as if we had terrific competition."

"Listen," said Monte, soberly. "We've been together eight years, and the closest we ever got to a Lindite ship was *hearing* about it once. What the hell is getting into you?"

"I got a feeling," Harper shrugged. "Something funny about that *Venus Sapphire* boat. It adds up, too. First, the look that Martian croupier gave me. Ever hear of a gentleman from the profession who was unwelcome on a gambling ship? Yep! Only on Lindite ships."

"Go ahead," Monte sneered. "Get the I.P. to raid the ship because someone gave you a look. And what would Maxwell Green, an I.P. man, be doing there? From the way you put it, the ship was co-oper[illegible]ith him."

"Why not? They'd have to." Harper got up and began pacing. "If you'll only listen a minute . . . Here's the way I see it. Max came here on a tip from the I.P. that a Lindite ship was around somewhere. He comes to Tyuio and by coincidence he spots us at the hotel. Maybe for a minute, his yen to lock me up gets the better of him and he follows me, just for auld lang syne. I happen to lead him to one of six or seven gambling ships that are hanging around Tyuio.

"Okay so far? Thanks. Once we're on the ship, Max suddenly realizes he has a chance to nab me, so he asks the captain of the *Venus Sapphire* to sail out of bounds. Certainly the captain recognized Max; every gambling ship in the System knows Max, so the captain is only too glad to agree to anything Max wants. Max tries and misses. Not only does he miss me, but he misses the fact that he is on *the* ship of the six or seven that he wants."

"But how do you know that Max is after a Lindite ship?" said Monte, perplexed. "What the hell kind of a deduction is that?"

"Because he certainly couldn't be after us or anyone else on Tyuio. It wouldn't do him any good, you agree. But that alone might still be a doubtful assumption, unless we could find a better reason for Max's being here than the fact that we're here. Now, *if there really was* a Lindite ship around, that would certainly be a better reason—right? You would agree that he was probably sooner after that ship than us?"

"Right."

"So—suppose I tell you that I *know* there's a Lindite ship in the vicinity—suppose I can prove it—would you be convinced that the story hangs together?"

"Uh-huh. Where's your proof?"

Cary Harper grinned and sat down again.

"Ain't got no proof," he said, cheerfully. "All I got is a feeling. I didn't like the look that Martian gave me."

"Please, why don't you stop wasting my time?" Monte pleaded. "I came out here for a sun tan, not an earache."

"Just the same," said Harper, "if I'm

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right, I have Max where I want him. And where do I want him? Where he may have to kick in with half of a hundred thousand bucks reward to a guy he hates. And why? Because I already know which one is the Lindite ship and he's just beginning a guessing campaign. And since time is going to be important, because they know that Max is around, I'm going to hunt up Max and have a talk with him."

"If you're through talking to yourself," said Monte in disgust, "I'd like to mention that things wouldn't be getting so progressively lousy if you showed up now and then and played a little, instead of disappearing every afternoon to the *Venus Sapphire* and every evening to I don't know where. Are you going to play tonight?"

Harper nodded distantly.

"Well, that's something. As for your hunting up Max, *I* got a feeling that Max is still going to do the hunting."

MAXWELL GREEN leaned back in his chair and finished his speech.

"It's a damned clever game he's been working, Mr. Van Horn," he said. "You can see he didn't overlook anything." He waited until James Van Horn turned away from the crystal window where he had been standing motionless for long minutes. His face was etched with lines of anger.

"I'm grateful to you, Mr. Green," he said. "I can scarcely . . ." He left the sentence unfinished, lost in thought.

Presently Green spoke.

"Thank you," he said, "but this isn't a question of gratitude. I'm here on a job—a job I've come a long, long way to see through. It may be possible for you to help me." He rubbed the purple welt that lay under his eye and added, "I can nail Cary Harper the minute he's deported from Tyuio."

"I don't understand," said Van Horn, quietly.

Green stood up and walked to the desk, facing the older man.

"I won't mince words, Mr. Van Horn," he said. "You're one of the most powerful men in this part of the System. You own half of Tyuio. A suggestion from you to the proper Tyuionian authorities that Harper be deported could hardly be neglected."

"I see. May I ask, Mr. Green, on what specific charges the Colonial Police want this man Harper?"

Green hesitated for a moment before he answered.

"Assault," he said, his heavy face reddening until the dark welt seemed to grow even darker. "Assault while resisting arrest. He was wanted on ten separate conspiracy charges."

"And being wanted for conspiracy, you mention assault first?"

"Yes. Assault against the Colonial Police during a space flight is worth ten years imprisonment."

"May I ask whether you were the man he assaulted?"

"I don't see what difference it makes," said Green, quietly.

"None," said Van Horn, "except that I should dislike using what influence I may have to settle a private affair. Because here on Tyuio, you see, it is a private affair."

"Then would you say," said Green, evenly, "that Harper's use of your family is also a private affair?"

"Frankly, Mr. Green, I would have preferred it so."

Van Horn threw in the audiovisor switch and pressed down one of a row of lettered buttons. In a moment, on a large screen that was imbedded in the wall behind him, a girl's face appeared. Rather, the suggestion of a face appeared, for the girl was combing her hair and her long, blonde tresses hung down over her face. She moved away a

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mass of golden hair until a mischievous blue eye twinkled through, and she said:

"Yes, father?"

"Please come to my study, Lois," said Van Horn. He threw the switch back and faced Green. "Unfortunately," he said, taking up the conversation again, "the life of a junior bank clerk, no matter how wealthy or influential his father is, cannot remain a private affair. If what you say is true, Mr. Green, Harper will be deported."

THE two men waited in silence until Lois Van Horn entered the study. She came in on tip-toe, her lovely face silently questioning her father with a curious smile, as if she were unused to coming to his study, as if it were an intrusion. When her father introduced her to Green, mentioning his official capacity, she raised an eyebrow pertly.

"Lois," said Van Horn, "do you know a man named Cary Harper?"

Suddenly the girl's expression changed. The smile faded as she said:

"I know a man named Cary. I—I didn't know his other name." She looked sharply at Green. "Why do you ask, father?"

"How did you meet him?"

"It was at a restaurant, two weeks ago. He fell against my table, the coffee spilled all over him. Then . . . we just met," she finished, looking from one man to the other. Her smile flashed into being again with startling brilliance. "How silly of you, darling," she laughed. "You didn't have to hire detectives. I was going to tell you all about him. He's just the kind of a man you—"

"What do you know about him, Lois?"

"Well, I must say you're being very solemn about it," said the girl, sitting down on the desk. "What do I know about him? Let's see. He's taller than brother by so much." She held thumb and forefinger apart to indicate two inches. "And he has dark hair and dark eyes, and he likes to go rowing in the park. And he dances magnificently. We've gone dancing almost every night. Aside from that, I don't know what to tell you except that I asked him to marry me yesterday and he said yes."

Van Horn recoiled.

"What did you say?" he snapped.

"What's the matter, Dad? I didn't really mean it that way. I only meant that he thinks he did the proposing. . ." Her voice died away. There was no mistaking the expression on her father's face now.

"Lois," said Van Horn, "earlier this afternoon I discovered that your brother Richard has been stealing from the bank that employs him. He's stolen almost forty thousand dollars to satisfy gambling debts, debts that he owed to the man you've been seeing these two weeks!"

Lois Van Horn looked at her father as if she hadn't understood him.

"No," she said slowly. "I don't see what you're trying. . . I love him, Dad. You can't separate us. You don't—"

"Listen to me, Lois," Van Horn interrupted, taking her hand. "I'm not trying to do anything. You know I wouldn't interfere with your life. But this man Harper has been seeing you just to find out things about your brother Richard. He's driven him to theft. All you mean to him is a further chance to meet prospects whom he can rob."

The girl was still shaking her head, unable to speak, when Green handed her a small, folded paper. She took it with trembling hands and opened it. At the top was a small picture of Cary Harper, and under it were several

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lines of print:

WANTED BY THE COLONIAL INTERPLANETARY POLICE
CARY HARPER

Particulars: Cary Harper is six feet, one inch in height; weight, 170; dark hair, dark eyes. Dresses excellently, speaks several languages, drinks in moderation and smokes Virginia (Earth) cigarettes. He is invariably accompanied by a confederate known as Three-Card Monte. Harper has no prison record, but police are warned that he is clever and dangerous. He is a professional gambler and is usually found on cruise vessels or in first class hotels in large cities.

He is wanted by the C.I.P. for first degree assault and by the Royal Uranian Government on ten counts of conspiracy. Address all inquiries: CH-9055.

Lois Van Horn put down the paper and looked dully at her father.

"Yes," she said, chokingly, "this is the man. But I can't believe. . . I can't believe that he. . . did what you say."

"Of course," said Green, in a subdued voice, "I understand how you must feel about this, Miss Van Horn. Harper is one of the slickest articles still in circulation. And if there are any doubts in your mind about what I've told your father, I am prepared to prove the case against this man." He paused and looked at Van Horn. "As it happens, Mr. Van Horn, I have had word that your son Richard will be present at a gambling group tonight, playing opposite Harper again."

Van Horn put his arm around his daugher and said,

"Can you arrange for us to be there?"

Green nodded silently.

"I DON'T get it," said Monte, gloomily. "It's just like I told you—Green's doing the hunting instead of you." The sound of his footsteps echoed against the walls of the old houses that lined the street. Cary Harper walked beside him, humming a tune. "What's the idea of Max calling you up at the hotel and wanting to know where he could meet you?"

"Maybe," Harper grinned, "he wanted to meet me, huh?"

"Sure. An I.P. man agrees to meet you at a session?"

"Why not? Gambling's legal in Tyuio, and that's where I said I would be."

"The whole thing stinks!" said Monte, emphatically. "An hour after you take a sock at him he calls you up for an appointment. Don't tell me he decided to kiss and make up. What's cooking?"

"My theory, Monte, and this fits perfectly. I told you Max wouldn't let anything interfere with business. Maybe it occurred to him that I might know something he would like to know."

Monte snorted.

"That Lindite ship junk again?"

"Fifty even money he proposes a deal before I do?"

"You got a bet."

They were close to the outskirts of the city now. Behind them the lights of Vhedy filled the night with the soft glow of myriad colors, but here the only illumination came from the sparkling light of nearby moons, and after awhile, from the country lamps of a large house that stood back from the road, shaded by gigantic Venusian swamp trees.

Just before they reached the high gate that surrounded the house, both men drew on black masks that completely covered their faces. At the gatehouse, Harper held a small white

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card up to the guard's torch for inspection. A winding path led them to the house.

Inside, a servant took their coats and ushered them up a flight of stairs which gave into a huge, luxurious room that was filled with laughter and gaiety. Men and women were everywhere, at the bar, at a large Martian piano that needed three men to make it produce a sound, sitting about and talking casually of all sorts of things. It might have been a party at a country estate but for one minor detail—everyone in the room was masked with identical, black silken masks that allowed only their eyes to be seen.

Cary Harper and Monte entered and sat down quietly in a corner. For many of the people in the room, the masks were a dramatic frill, an added filip to thrill hunters. But there were those present, undoubtedly, who would not have come if masking had not been compulsory, men and women who for some private reason needed money desperately, who were prepared to play for stakes that might have attracted too much attention aboard a gambling ship. There were always such people . . . it was for them that Lindite ships existed . . .

SO CARY HARPER thought as he sat, thumbing idly through a book, trying to remember which of the voices around him he had heard before. There were hardly any. In his first week in this house, number forty-four Feyda Lane, there had been the same voices night after night, voices that spoke infrequently because they had come too often. Now those voices were missing. They had disappeared one after another in the ensuing days, and with their disappearance, the nightly stakes at number forty-four Feyda Lane had dwindled.

It was indeed as Harper had told Monte—as if they were running against terrific competition, against a house that offered better odds. And there could be only one answer to that, for only one kind of house could afford to play for better odds . . . a house that counted its winnings in some other medium than money.

Harper listened to the bubbling conversation and knew from their carelessness that they didn't give a damn if they were recognized. He almost regretted that he had come; such people wouldn't play for the stakes that interested Harper.

Still, when the cashier came to him, he bought a sizable stack of chips. Monte had sauntered away, unwilling to allow anyone to associate him with Harper, as they might have done were a short man always to be seen with a tall one. It was one of the innumerable little precautions of the profession. There was always the possibility that someday they would run across someone in this room, on a cruise, say, where knowledge of their identity might prove embarrassing.

Servants opened the door to an adjoining room, and as Harper entered, he was given a pair of black gloves which he put on. The room contained half a dozen low tables surrounded by chairs, every bit of the furniture a dull ebony. Harper went to the largest table and sat down. Of the others near him, he thought he recognized two men. In a moment, the house representative inquired for their game.

"Anacrat," said a man.

Only two men beside Harper voted for it, and the choice went to the mild Mercurian game of Senna. The house representative broke open a sealed carton of Senna cards and laid them on the table. The cards had snow white backs, and against the black of the

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table and the gloved hands they stood out with sharp clarity.

Several rounds of play went by during which Harper tried the bank, won it once and lost it promptly. He had no interest in the proceedings until a well-dressed young man opposite him won the bank, after several rather daring plays.

Immediately the bank called for double stakes. Three players signaled drop-out and Harper took up one of the vacancies. He lost, and promptly took up another vacancy, playing three hands against the bank. He lost again, and when two others dropped, Harper took every vacancy and called for six hands.

A murmur swept the room. The masked figure opposite Harper nodded agreement.

"Double stakes again?" he asked. Harper put up the stakes and settled back. He had changed in the past few minutes. If his mask had been off, those around him at the table would have seen his eyes were cool and clear, and a faint smile playing about his lips. He played with a detached manner, a carelessness almost.

THE white cards fell noiselessly. After the first round the murmuring had grown stronger. Players who had dropped from other tables came to stand near this table, watching the hands. In the first round four of Harper's six hands had won.

The dealer paused. His eyes swept the table and his hands seemed to tremble the least bit. Cary Harper made no move to draw in his chips, and the dealer said quietly,

"Odds on?"

Harper nodded and put up more chips. The bank had offered two to one against him. The evening was developing into something quite different from what he had expected.

The second round fell, and talking stopped. Five of Harper's six hands had come through.

The dealer looked across the table and his grey eyes met Cary Harper's. For an instant Harper felt that he wasn't looking into the man's eyes, that his gaze had fallen against something hard and impenetrable. The grey eyes were misty, clouded. The man raised a hand to his forehead, absently, and felt the mask. Under that mask he must have been perspiring, but he was unable to do anything about it. It was the unconscious gesture of a man unused to masked playing, a novice at the game, and yet his stakes were—

"Odds again?"

There was a harsh intake of breath from the swelled ranks of the spectators, but it came from Harper's unhesitating agreement rather than the offer. The bank was now offering five to one on the third round, a tremendous figure. But the mathematical odds were at least fifty to one. Unless Harper came up with at least three winners, out of a possible total six winners left in the deck, he would be wiped out.

He had agreed with instinctive swiftness. Long moments before he had decided his course if the offer came. His eyes had silently lifted across the room to where Monte was playing stolidly, and Monte had turned to him for an instant; he could almost see Monte's smile, the same smile that lay coldly on Harper. He was like ice now. . . .

One by one the cards had noiselessly slid to the table, and they showed five winners!

Harper stared through his mask at the man across the table. In three quick rounds he had lost the bank and close to four thousand dollars. What was going on in his mind? He played with sudden fits and starts, as if each card

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that he dealt was a struggle.

"What stakes does the bank play?" said the man.

Harper waved a hand, avoiding talking, signifying that the bank was open. The man called the cashier, bought an additional five thousand dollars with crisp bills and asked for a count of available hands.

Harper glanced around the table. No one else was playing. It had developed into a duel.

"Ten hands," said Harper.

"I'll play them all."

EXPERTLY, deftly, Harper dealt the white cards. He had declared the bank open and he met every proposed increase. His interest was now in the man, rather than in the money. Harper had played larger stakes, but his opponent was something new. He plunged at the slightest chance, doubled every high card. When he won he looked at the chips for long moments, as if he was counting them. When he held the bank, which changed hands again and again, he played stupidly.

Once during the hour that the duel lasted Harper felt a pang of regret. That was when the man bought another ten thousand dollars worth of chips. It wasn't that the man's luck was against him—the fact was that he never gave luck a chance, that he played insanely, blindly, pressing, squeezing, forcing himself against a wall. Harper didn't like it. He didn't enjoy sitting behind the law of averages. It took the drama out of the game. It made Harper a banker even when the other man held the bank.

When it was over, the man sat quietly, his glazed eyes fixed on the chips as if he didn't understand what had happened. He got up finally and slowly left the room. After that, Harper waited only until he had lost the bank to the returning players, then he too stopped.

As he walked out of the room, a man fell into step beside him. Even through the man's mask there was no mistaking his short, barrel-chested figure. It was Maxwell Green. Two paces behind, also heading for the stairs, were a man and a woman.

"Nice killing you made tonight, Harper," Green said.

Harper turned in a swift gesture of annoyance.

"Don't bother using names," he said. "What's on your mind?"

Green motioned to one of the side doors.

"Let's step in here. It's all right. I've arranged it." He opened the door and went in behind Harper. The man and the woman came up quickly and followed the two men in. Before Harper could say anything, Green said, "They're in on this—friends of mine."

"In on what?"

"On your little game," said Green. With a sudden thrust he came forward and tore the mask from Harper's face. Then he turned to the man and woman and said, "This should remove the last doubt."

The woman turned quickly and started for the door, but with a leap, Harper was there before her. He closed the door again, and standing with his back against it, said,

"I don't understand what you're up to, Green, but I think this calls for a general unmasking." His face was cold and hard as he surveyed the three masked figures.

"I think not," said Green. He held his right hand up. There was a heavy service heat pistol in his hand. "Get away from that door," he said, coming forward.

Harper slowly shook his head.

"Remember," he said, "this isn't legal." In complete disregard of Green,

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he advanced to the man who stood beside Green and ripped off the mask, staring at the revealed face. After a momentary silence, he said, "But I don't know you . . ."

Green said,

"This is the father of the boy you fleeced tonight, the boy you've driven to debt and stealing."

A baffled expression came over Cary Harper.

"What are you talking about?"

"Perhaps you know me better than my father." As she spoke, the girl took off her mask.

HARPER stood there stunned. He tried to speak but no sound came from his bloodless lips.

"There's no use pretending, Cary," said the girl, her voice subdued and controlled. "You only met me because it was convenient for your business activities. You drew me out about my brother and my friends like a salesman with a prospective list of clients. You've bled my brother white, until he turned thief, and even that wasn't enough for you. Tonight you fleeced him from the—" In spite of herself, tears were rolling down her cheeks.

"Lois," said Harper, drawing a hand across his face. "I swear to you that I didn't know that boy was your brother. I've never played against him before. I've never even spoken to him. All these things you're saying don't mean anything . . . they can't mean anything. It's true that I'm a gambler. I didn't tell you, I couldn't. I was going to quit and tell you afterward. But these other things—Lois, you can't go!"

She had started for the door again. Her father, his face the picture of frozen anger, came between her and Harper as Harper tried to stop her. From behind Green stuck the gun into Harper's back and said,

"Get out of the way, Harper. This time I mean it."

The door opened and a voice said,

"Put away that gun, Max. You're a big boy now."

Monte closed the door behind him and faced Green, holding a deadly Martian dart gun in his hand.

"There's only one dart in this," he said solemnly, "but you can have it. I ain't selfish."

Green regarded Monte, then, pursing his lips, he lowered his pistol and returned it to its holster. Harper stood there, still bewildered trying to think. Thoughts were racing about crazily in his mind, eluding him just when they seemed to make sense. If only —

"Nothing you can say will alter matters," said Van Horn, grimly. "I give you my word you will both be deported within twenty-four hours."

Deported! Then that was the answer! Somehow, Green had worked out a plan that would bring Monte and him within Green's grasp. Somehow he had learned of his meetings with Lois, then convinced her and Van Horn . . . but there it left a muddy trail . . .

"Monte," said Harper, "you've been here every night. Did you ever see that man I played against? Has he been here before?"

"Maybe once, but I doubt it."

Then young Van Horn had gambled elsewhere. And if he had gambled for the kind of money he had put forward tonight, then it—it fitted perfectly again! It began to make sense again!

"Listen, Max," said Harper, quickly. "I know why you're here on Tyuio. I don't care what you think about this case. Maybe you're out to get me, but you're missing the big thing this is pointing to. That boy hasn't been playing here and there isn't a place he could lose such money except one—a Lindite ship!"

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GREEN'S eyes narrowed incredulously, then he threw his head back and roared with laughter.

"You're slipping, Harper!" he said, happily. "You're really digging them up now!"

"Don't you see?" cried Harper. "He's too well known to have lost a lot of money publicly on an ordinary gambling boat. And this is the only big gambling house in Vhedy and I know he hasn't played here."

Green stopped laughing suddenly, then he said,

"Really? Then why should he have been here tonight at all? Did those convenient Lindites of yours decide that his money wasn't good anymore? Or that he wouldn't be happy in Lindar?"

Harper was unable to answer. There was no answer, unless Monte was wrong, or they were all wrong. Where was his wild theory of a Lindite ship now? Green had laughed at him instead of making proposals. Green had come to Tyuio determined to bring Cary Harper back with him. That alone was his reason for being there, and that was the business he had undertaken to finish. Deported—that was the answer to it all.

"Lois," said Harper, desperately, "I can't explain, but there must be some explanation. If you spoke to your brother—"

He knew it was useless to speak. This time when she went to the door he made no effort to stop her. Something had gone dead in her, so completely dead that it seemed strange to think it had ever been alive. Her eyes looked past him, cold, filled with scorn and contempt.

"Lois," Harper cried, "you must trust me!"

"I'd sooner trust a snake."

Moments later, when they had gone, Monte stood beside Harper in the room, waiting for him to speak.

"We were in love, Monte," Harper said. He seemed to be in a daze. "We were going to be married . . ."

"I know. I listened at the door. That's why you didn't tell me about going to the ship. You knew I'd be against your seeing that girl, or any girl, seriously." Monte nodded his head in sympathy as he went on quietly. "It's like I always said, Cary. The way we live, guys like us can't get tangled up. Our motto has to be 'Makes No Difference.' We're the original what-the-hell boys. No strings, no attachments, nothing to lose. Guys like us got to stay cold inside."

"I was going to tell her, Monte. I was hiding money from you, money I'd won on that ship, so that we could start new. I was going to get out of the game for good."

"You're wrong, Cary," said Monte, softly. He took Harper's arm as they started out. "You couldn't have gotten out. But if you really wanted to try, I'd have been rooting for you all the way. . . ."

IT was some three hours later, halfway through the long night of Tyuio, that the audivisor in Cary Harper's room buzzed stridently. Harper came in from the terrace where he had been sitting with Monte, unable to sleep, and detached the buzzer. The noise stopped, but a few moments later, the hotel phone jangled and Monte answered. Monte came out to the terrace and sank into his chair.

"That was her on the AV," he said. "After you cut the connection she called the hotel. Asked them to put you on. Important."

"What'd you say?"

"Do not disturb."

Harper nodded his head. It was quiet there on the terrace. The stars of

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the ever unfamiliar constellations shone brightly, scarcely twinkling in the clear, thin atmosphere of Tyuio. Far, far off, a mere dot in the void at that great distance, was the Ghort constellation. A hundred odd planetoids made up that group, among them Forelle, the water-station of the Jupiter-Tyuio voyage. How far was Jupiter from here? Months, perhaps, by slow, rusty freighters. Far enough away to help a man forget, if one could choose one's destination. . . .

"What do you suppose she wanted?"

Monte shrugged.

"What's the difference?" he said. "You know where you stand with her, and now she knows where she stands with you."

The audivisor began to buzz again.

"Maybe I shouldn't have put the switch back on," said Monte. "That must be her again. I'll take—"

"Never mind." Harper got up and went back to the sitting room. He flipped open the switch. The pale amber screen flickered into life, and there was Lois Van Horn.

"Cary!" she cried. Her eyes that had been so cold were wide with fear now. Her golden hair was disheveled. She stood before her transmitter, seemingly oblivious of the fact that she wore only a filmy negligee. "Cary!" she breathed. "Something has happened to my brother. You must listen to me!"

She said that because she could see that Harper was about to destroy the connection. For a split instant, Harper hesitated. A few hours before he had asked her almost the same thing and she . . .

In that moment of indecision the girl acted. She brought her own transmitter into line with the screen of what apparrently was the audivisor system of her home. The screen was lit, showing the interior of a room. The room appeared empty.

"It's my brother's room, Cary," came the girl's choked voice. "He doesn't know his transmitter is on. He's doing—"

Harper saw what Ralph Van Horn was doing then. The boy had come within view of the screen, and Harper watched the scene with paralyzed fascination. Ralph Van Horn looked strikingly like his sister. He had the same blue eyes, his hair was closely cropped and the color of wet sand. His high forehead was covered with sweat, and a large blue vein stood out prominently on his temple.

The boy stood in the middle of the floor. At his feet lay a globe, glistening white and small enough to be held in one hand. Young Van Horn was staring at the globe with a terrifying, intense concentration. Every fibre of his being seemed to focus on the globe.

Then a strange thing happened. Slowly, as the boy stared at the globe, it began to rise from the floor! He was three feet away from it and it kept rising, seemingly of its own volition, until it was a foot off the floor. It hung there in mid-air for a moment, its polished surface revolving the least bit, then it began to drop. It went halfway to the floor and suddenly bobbed up again, higher than it had been, and all at once it hit the floor and rested there without moving.

RALPH VAN HORN sank to the floor beside it, his face working, tears streaming down his cheeks silently, the picture of utter exhaustion. After awhile he got up, waited until his breathing had become normal again, took up the ball in his hands and disappeared from the screen.

"It's the Lindites!" Harper snapped, releasing himself from the spell that had come over him. "Listen to me—you've

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got to get the police—no, that's no good. It's Green we need now! Tell your father to get Green immediately!"

"It's no use," the girl sobbed. "I've tried to get him for the past half-hour. He went away with father and I came home alone. I can't find either of them. You must help me, Cary, you must!"

'Where is Green staying?"

"At Interplanetary House."

"I'll get him. You stay there and don't let your brother out of your sight. If he tries to leave, stop him—no matter how!"

Harper switched off and turned quickly to Monte, who stood beside him. He had come in from the terrace long moments before, he had seen enough to understand.

"Monte, we've got to find Max Green!"

"What's wrong with the Tyuio police?"

"The scandal—it's bound to get out!"

"What's that to you?"

Harper turned back to the audivisor.

"Get me Interplanetary House, fast!" The screen blanked, then went on again. "Mr. Maxwell Green, please."

The girl operator smiled.

"He just came in. One moment, please."

"Luck!" said Harper, fiercely, and the screen lit up again.

"Hello, Harper," said Green, mildly surprised. "What's this?"

"Max, I just got a call from Lois Van Horn! You can call her if you don't believe me. She's seen her brother with one of those white Lindite globes!"

"You're crazy!"

"I'm not crazy! Don't stand there gaping! Call her and then rush over there. I'm going now!"

A QUARTER of an hour later, two surface cabs almost collided as they swung to a halt before the dark entrance of the Van Horn mansion. Harper and Monte leaped out of one cab and Maxwell Green from the other. Swiftly, the trio ran up the tiled stairs and rang at the door. Green was breathless.

"I saw the whole thing," he said grimly. "The girl lined up two AV systems. You were right, Harper, but thank God it's not too late yet."

Lois Van Horn herself swung open the door. Her brother was still in his room. He was still doing the same thing.

"Where's your father?" said Green tersely.

"I thought he was with you."

Green's eyes were darting about through the thick-lensed glasses he wore. He started for the interior stairs.

"Show us upstairs," he said. "Your father's on his way here. He went to the bank with the manager, but he was gone when I called."

The girl led them up a flight of stairs and stopped before a door that gave off from the landing. Without waiting for her to knock, Green swung the door open and strode in.

Ralph Van Horn was lying stretched out on a chair. The white globe lay in the middle of the floor, reflecting the light. The instant Green walked in, young Van Horn jumped from the chair and tried to seize the globe. Halfway in mid-air, Green's barrel-chested, heavy body cut him off with a block. Green got up, took the globe and held it out to the terror-stricken boy.

"We'll make it short and sweet, Mr. Van Horn," he said, quietly. "You're in the hands of Lindites. If you ever want to get out, tell us where you got this Lindite sphere."

A spasm shook the boy's body. He backed away, shaking his head.

"No!" he cried. "I don't know where I got it. I found it! That's it,

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I found it!"

Green grunted and threw the ball to a couch. He advanced to the boy holding his hands away from his sides.

"You can tell me," he said, his voice hardly audible. "I'm the law, you know, and you've got to tell me whether you want to or not . . ." There was a hypnotic quality in Green's manner as he spoke to the boy. "I'm going to find out," he said, softly. "You know that, don't you?"

Young Van Horn edged behind a chair, still retreating from Green, still shaking his head.

"Leave me alone," he whimpered. "Go away!"

Suddenly Green swung around the chair and grabbed the boy. He took both Van Horn's hands into his own, and with his free hand he smashed the boy across his face with an open palm.

"Tell me!" Green demanded furiously, hitting him again and again.

"I found it!" the boy screamed. "Can't you understand? *I found it!*" Helplessly he struggled against Green's bull strength, unable to free himself. *"Lois! Help me!"*

With one accord, Harper and the girl started for Green, but Green had already released the boy. His face was clouded and pre-occupied as he faced them.

"Don't teach me my business, Harper. Stay out of this," Green sighed. "I'm sorry, Miss Van Horn. I'm not enjoying this, believe me." He watched the boy sink into a chair. Young Van Horn couldn't take his eyes off the white globe. Gloomily, Green took the globe from the couch and held it in his hands.

"It's the same old story," he said in a voice that betrayed his anger. "He won't talk—because he can't talk. They've given him what they call their Drink of Honor."

"Max, I know where that globe came from!"

"What?"

"I tell you I do! It's that ship I was on today—the *Venus Sapphire!*"

"How do you know?" Green demanded.

"I—I just know. Call it a hunch, call it anything. Didn't I know there was a Lindite ship around? You've got to take the—"

BUT Green was shaking his head. "You're w r o n g, Harper. The *Venus Sapphire* pulled out an hour ago. And no Lindite ship would go leaving one of these globes behind unless they had a damn good reason."

"Isn't the discovery of this globe reason enough?" cried Harper.

"Sure," Green nodded, "but Miss Van Horn didn't discover the globe until *after* that ship had gone."

"Maybe they had another reason! Maybe it's just a coincidence!"

"Okay, Harper," said Green, quietly. "Maybe this and maybe that. You're just wild guessing now and we can't afford to guess. You'll admit that I'm at least as interested as you are in nailing a Lindite boat? Thanks. Now let's see what we have."

He turned the globe around in his hands, brooding.

"The one thing we can be reasonably sure of is the fact that the Lindite ship, whichever one it is, doesn't yet know that anyone suspects it's here. And if we can keep that knowledge from them a little longer, maybe we can be led to it."

"How?" Harper said.

For an answer, Green set the white globe down on a table and fixed his gaze on it. He continued looking at it for a full minute, and then, slowly, the globe shuddered slightly and moved vertically into the air. All at once Green

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let out his breath and the globe hit the table with a sharp thud.

"I've seen one or two of these before," Green said, bitterly. "Will power works them. *Will power!* Think of it!" He bit his heavy lips and stared at the globe in fascination until sweat fogged his glasses. "Let me give you the whole picture," Green went on. "It's an old story . . . .

"This lad went up to a gambling ship for a night's fun. The minute they saw him they knew they had a prospect, because he was rich, and only the rich can't afford to lose. Sounds odd, doesn't it? It's true. The ordinary youngster couldn't lose enough to get in deep! But this boy went there, maybe had a drink too much, and there he was, playing fairly steep stakes for a few hours. He probably lost no more than a few thousand dollars—but they had him hooked! Because only a wealthy man could return for another try. Get it?

"So he came back," Green continued, "and he lost again."

"Crooked wheels or dice?" Harper asked.

"Never. Lindite ships play absolutely legitimately because they are playing for lives, not money. They can't afford to be caught with a crooked game that might lead to an investigation of the ship. They play honestly, and the laws of chance on dice and their wheels give them an edge of about twenty-five per cent in the long run."

GREEN took off his glasses and polished them deliberately before he went on.

"Well, after maybe a few nights of playing, the boy was in deep. Too deep. He took the usual course. Only the wealthy have opportunities at money that isn't theirs; this boy took his bank's money. He kept trying to win, but the games had him licked on percentage."

"What if he had won back his money?" said Harper, then added, "I see. If he had won, then he'd be out. But they had plenty like him, and all of them couldn't win. Someone would have to lose."

"Exactly. This boy fell among those who lost. We know that because the globe tells the story. He was finally in so deep that he was ready to listen to anything . . . *That was when they offered him the ultimate gamble!* He could get back double what he had lost —if he took the white globe! He accepted, and took their Drink of Honor."

Green looked at Harper and said, "Ever hear of it?"

Harper nodded.

"It's a drug, isn't it?"

"So they say," Green said somberly. "No one knows; we know only its effects.* The drink is an unbelievably powerful compulsive agent. It destroys the will, perhaps, or the memory. Either the man cannot say where he got the globe or he doesn't remember. He knows only what he must do with it. The Drink of Honor, whatever hellish drug it is, compels one to go through with the test in a limited time, and if the test fails, to surrender oneself, leaving

* Tests on two refugees from Lindar by Dr. A. A. Kingsley, as well as on small quantities of the drug known as the Drink of Honor which were found on captured Lindite vessels, definitely appear to prove the contention that the drug acts on the will. This, according to the researches of Prof. Worth and others, was an absolute necessity for the Lindite aim in bringing slaves to Lindar. So horrible and difficult is the world of Lindar to humans that the slightest desire to leave is enough to upset the balance which Dr. Stevens has named the *trauma*—or the will to survive. Humans with free will must invariably experience the desire, rather the driving urge, to leave. Such a desire will prove fatal very quickly if the human remains. The tragedy is further deepened by the fact that he cannot leave.

Unfortunately, the rapid deterioration and death of the refugees put an end to the valuable experiments.—Ed.

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no clue."

A shudder swept through Lois as she asked,

"What is the test?" She was sitting limply in a chair, her face blanched and fearful.

"Did you see what I did to the globe?" said Green. "Anyone can do it—to an extent. It responds to will power. There is nothing inside, the globe is a solid mass of some unknown substance that comes from the ancient mines of Lindar. Will power can make it move in any direction. The test is to keep it in mid-air for one hundred seconds."

Slowly, Harper said,

"And it can be done?"

"It has been done. There's nothing phoney about that. The globe is as honest as their games, and there is one of the great reasons for the Lindite successes. Once in a long while somebody does beat the test, and if that happens, the compulsion to remain silent is gone." Green laughed moodily. "Clever, isn't it? When they lose, they get advertising; the news spreads like wildfire—Lindites can be beaten."

"I've heard that," said Harper. "If the Lindites never lost, in time no one would take the chance. It's that chance that they dangle before you, that and their reputation for honesty."

"And what can the I.P. do against a set-up like that?" said Green. "Look at how the test works. You don't have to take it aboard their ship. They let you take the globe with you, take the test anywhere you want, within 200 miles of the ship, and inside of fifty hours.

"In complete privacy, you can practice raising this fiendish globe over and over, until you've done it dozens of times. When you're ready, you just tell yourself that you're going to take it. That's all there is to it—you just can do it, you've won. If you fail, you can try twice more, declaring to yourself each time that you are taking it. Three failures—" Green snapped his fingers viciously, "—finish!"

FOR the first time, Monte spoke.

"And then?" he asked, quietly.

"You go to the Lindite ship and give yourself up. No farewells, no letters, no clues. Nothing can stop you. You know you've failed three times. You've lost, and you go because you must go, because you took a certain little drink." An acid smile played on Green's lips. Between his teeth he said, "That's why they call it the Drink of Honor!"

"Suppose you win?" said Monte. "What happens to the globe?"

"You have fifty hours time," Green answered. "If it passes and you haven't taken the test, it's as if you lost, and you surrender to the Lindites of your own volition. But if you win—*the globe returns to the Lindite ship by itself!*"

"Ah-h-h," said Harper, drawing in his breath. "I begin to see what you meant, Max. You think the boy has been taking the test?"

"No doubt about it."

"And a large part of the fifty hours must be up?"

"It's hard to say, but it makes no difference. We'll just keep this lad under our eyes until fifty hours have passed, and then. . ." Green looked squarely at the youth, ". . . wherever this white globe goes, we'll be going with it. It must lead us to the ship!"

Green sat down on the arm of the couch and added,

"We'll probably have to call in the Tyuionian police, Miss Van Horn. With your father's influence, there's little chance of this leaking out."

"There's an excellent chance of it

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leaking out," said Harper. "This is a gambler's heaven. I should know," he smiled, grimly. "Why don't you call in the I.P.?"

"I have called them. They ought to be here within a few days, and it may be too late by then."

"A few days? Aren't they nearby, waiting?"

"Waiting for what?" said Green, impatiently.

"Didn't the I.P. send you here to scout a Lindite ship?"

"No one sent me," said Green, evenly. "I came here for you, Harper, and I'll go back with you when this is finished."

"A wiser and a wealthier man," said Harper. "A hundred thousand bucks wealthier."

The door leading to the hall had opened the least bit, and a deep, guttural voice said, "Wiser, perhaps, Mr. Green. . ."

The door swung open entirely. An eight foot Jovian stood at the threshold, big electric bolt guns in either of his two huge hands. He jutted his head forward to indicate another armed Jovian on the balcony outside. Both adjoining doors to the room opened, disclosing two more of the giant gunmen. Their pale skin, stretched tight across great, bony skulls, made them look like death-heads.

"Wiser, Mr. Green," the first Jovian repeated in hollow tones, "but hardly wealthier, not to mention your health."

"What do you want?" said Green, slowly sliding to his feet.

"A hostage," replied the Jovian, "a hostage in the event that your friends of the Colonial police should prove troublesome. We would therefore prefer taking you alive, Mr. Green, and unless you stop moving your hand towards your weapons, you may spoil our plans. Please put your hands over your head—all of you!" The last was a short, savage command, enforced by a sudden thrust of the guns.

"Search them, Otho," said the leader. The Jovian came in from the balcony and let his great hands feel out Monte's dart gun and the heat pistol that Green wore in a shoulder holster. "I see you gentlemen have your favorites," the leader observed, mockingly. "Now, Mr. Green, please precede me out of this room. Otho, the globe."

For a moment, Green hesitated, his muscular, short body poised for a leap. Harper grated,

"Don't be a fool, Max!"

The Jovian showed his long teeth in a leer, swinging the bolt guns easily. Green picked up his hat, shrugged and went out. The other Jovians followed him, and the leader, before he closed the door behind him, observed,

"Please be careful. You are not concerned in this."

THE instant the door closed, Harper sprang to the audivisor. He threw the switch in, but the screen remained dark and the short-long distress signal buzzed. The efficient Jovians had taken the precaution of wrecking the AV system.

"Monte!" Harper barked. "You stay—"

"Where are you going?" Monte cried. "The boy is safe and Max is none of our business. He's still out to get you!"

"He'll wind up on Lindar unless we help him!" Harper grated. "You stay here and watch the boy. Don't leave him for a minute. I'll be back as soon as I can!" He swung the door open, hesitated, crossed the room to Lois Van Horn and took her in his arms. Then he left.

He ran for almost five minutes before he caught a surface cab.

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"Police headquarters!" he cried. "As fast as this buggy'll go!" The Tyuionian driver swallowed and his little vehicle shot forward. Three minutes later a police car overtook them. Harper shouted to them and the pursuer became an escort. They tore through the wide, empty streets of Vhedy at breakneck speed, pulling up before the striped green lights of the Tyuionian police, brakes squealing in anguish.

Precious minutes flitted by while Harper argued with the desk Corporal in charge. The Corporal sent for his Sergeant, the Sergeant for a Lieutenant. Finally Colonel Greizz was awakened. He came down to his office, a huge black robe wrapped around his tiny body. He sat at his desk, stroking his grey goatee, listening to Harper. His thin fingers tapped the desk top; he said nothing until Harper finished.

"A most interesting story," the Colonel observed, mildly. "It is lacking however, in one or two particulars."

"You mean you don't believe me?"

"Hardly," said Greizz. "Especially in view of the fact that Mr. Van Horn, senior, never went nor intended to go to any bank. And this we know because he was here until half an hour ago, personally arranging for your deportation."

"Half an hour ago?" Harper repeated, "Then he should have returned home before I left. . . ."

"That is exactly what I am thinking."

"But Green told me—"

The little Colonel rose and leaned forward.

"It is perhaps more to the point to mention what Lieutenant Green told *me*. We are entirely acquainted with your case, Mr. Harper. We manage to keep desperate criminals under surveillance despite the benevolence of our laws."

"Listen to me, you damned fool!" Harper cried. "Why don't you contact the I.P. patrol and see whether or not Green called them!"

The Colonel blanched in sudden anger. He whirled sharply and said to one of his aides:

"You have a full report from the I.P.?"

"Yes, sir. Contact established with the destroyer *Greystone*, six days out. No communications received from Lieutenant Green or anyone else in Tyuio. This is the first they knew of his being here."

Colonel Greizz faced Harper.

"You forget, Mr. Harper, that lies do not necessarily succeed because they are bold. Not only armed Jovians can foul an AV system, as you evidently seem to have done. And—"

"You're nuts!" Harper shouted. "What are you standing there for? Why don't you come back with me and investigate? I've got plenty of proof!"

The Colonel took off his robe and donned the tunic of his gray and white uniform. His birdlike eyes fixed Harper and he said,

"But of course I intend to investigate. Didn't you think I would?"

THE Van Horn mansion was completely dark when the cortege of police drew up. For some reason, the sight suddenly made Cary Harper feel sick.

"Hurry!" he cried, as the Colonel mounted the stairs beside him, flanked by half a dozen officers.

When they reached the front door, they noticed it was ajar. The house inside was dark and silent. At the Colonel's command, one of the officers shouted. Presently they heard a noise, then all at once the house was brilliantly lighted. An old, frightened man, clad in nightclothes appeared from a

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door in the east wing. He came toward them as if in a stupor, and behind him other faces peeped through the door from which he had come.

"Police?" he faltered. "Then. . . then audivisor is working? We called you a little while ago, but . . . but there was no answer. . . ."

"*You* called us?" Greizz queried. "What for?" The old man looked at the Colonel and took a staggering step backward to keep his balance. "Speak up, man!" said the Colonel, sharply. "Who are you? Who are those people in the other room? What are you afraid of?"

"I'm Stefan . . . the butler. Those are the other servants. . . ." The old man shook his head. "I heard . . . voices . . . fighting . . . woke up the others. There's no one in the house. The master . . . hasn't come home yet and . . . Miss Lois . . . isn't here either."

"What's the matter with you?" said Greizz. One of the officers had gone into the east wing; now he came out again, holding a handkerchief to his nose. "Get me someone who can talk," the Colonel said. "Faniff, what's wrong here?"

The officer coughed violently.

"The whole wing has been smothered with Uranian powder, sir," he choked. "Place is reeking with it. These servants were all put to sleep."

With a cry, Harper shook himself loose and bounded up the stairs to the room where he had left Monte. This room too was dark.

"Monte!" Harper shouted, frantically. "Monte, where are you?" He stumbled forward into the dark room and almost fell as he kicked a prostrate body.

The police had come into the room by then. Harper called to them to help him take the body out. The Colonel immediately ordered Harper to stop.

"Don't touch anything!" he shrilled. "Get a light in here, somebody!"

One of the officers flicked on his glowtube. The white circle of light touched about the room. The place looked as if it had been caught in an etherswirl; the heavy furniture lay broken and scattered, smashed lamps lay on the floor, the carpet was wrinkled and stained.

Then, just as the glowtube caught Cary Harper, a voice mumbled incoherently, coming from the still figure that lay on the floor. It was Monte. He opened his eyes and looked up at Harper and the Colonel until full consciousness had returned.

"Sorry, Cary," he whispered, "he got away. . . ."

THE next moment, Stefan, the aged butler, entered and turned on the auxiliary lights. Colonel Greizz stared at Monte curiously.

"What kind of nonsense is this?" he demanded.

"Can you speak, Monte?" said Harper, anxiously. "What happened? Where is Lois and the boy?"

Monte sat up and rubbed his head.

"Guess I'm all right," he said slowly. "Got a nasty crack on the head from that kid. Help me up."

Leaning on Harper, Monte got to his feet.

"They're gone?" he asked, looking about the room. "Then he's taken her with him. . . ."

"Who's taken who with whom?" the Colonel barked.

"Monte! For the love of—what happened?" Harper cried, trying to keep control of himself.

"I can't understand it. About ten minutes after you left, the kid suddenly started to get wild. He made a rush for the door and I stopped him. He kept looking at his watch and scream-

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ing he had to get out. It scared hell out of me. You never saw anything like it—"

Harper turned to the Colonel.

"You see it, don't you? The boy knew his time was up. The fifty hours were expiring and he had to get to the Lindite ship!"

"I see," the Colonel nodded. "Please continue."

"At first I thought I could manage, but the kid had suddenly gotten the strength of a demon. He kept yelling and throwing things and trying to get through the door after I blocked the balcony with the couch. He must have knocked me across the room a couple of times, but I was able to hold on. Then he stunned me just as I whacked him a solid punch, and we both went down. I yelled to Lois to tie him up with a curtain sash.

"She was almost as bad as he was. She was crying and pleading with him, and when she tied him up, she tied herself to him—"

"She did what?" Harper cried out.

"She tied the other end of the sash to her arm. Cary, I couldn't stop her! She screamed that if her brother was going to that ship, she was going with him! He acted as if he didn't know she was alive, like an animal in a cage, unable to hear us or even see us. He got up, dragging her along, and I threw a chair at the lamps. Then in the dark, I started for the door—when bang!—I ran into him and he brought something down on my head."

Harper wheeled on the Colonel.

"They've gone to the ship!" he cried, his face drawn and haggard. "If it leaves with them aboard, they're finished! You've got to get out a general alarm immediately!"

Colonel Greizz drew a deep breath and kept his birdlike eyes on Monte.

"I still don't understand how you expect to get away, Harper," he said. "It can't be that you imagine you'll be lost in the scramble?"

"What do you mean?" Harper asked, feverishly.

"I mean," rasped the Colonel, "that until each of these four missing persons turns up, you will be held for their murder!"

CARY HARPER recoiled. "Why, you—you—" he gasped.

"Not that I actually think you've committed murder," Greizz went on, evenly. "You've probably hidden them somewhere, a place where they can be kept out of sight until you're gone, eh, Harper?"

"Listen to me, you tinhorn, comic-opera cop!" Harper stormed. "Get that imbecilic brain of yours out of correspondence school detective lessons and do something! Why in hell would I come to you in the first place if I had any part in this? Can't you see that the Jovians drugged the servants? Didn't you hear what—"

"Silence!" the Colonel snapped. "Anyone, including you, might have drugged the servants—and fouled the AV system, as I told you. Tomorrow you were to be deported. Four people were vitally interested in that. Tonight those four people are missing! You came to me with a cock and bull story about Lindite ships, about Lieutenant Green having called for the I.P. Do you think I am a child?"

Harper clutched his head wearily.

"All right," he said, in a monotone, his eyes catching Monte's for a fraction of an instant, then turning away. "Let's hear the rest of it. I suppose I was going to steal a gun from you and shoot my way out?" he emphasized slightly.

"Hardly," said Greizz, grimly. "Not knowing that either Mr. Van Horn or Lieutenant Green had been to see me,

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you arranged this absurd display. *You* drugged the servants! *You* destroyed the AV-system! *You* kidnaped the four people who were intent on your punishment! And I have no doubt that you intended sneaking off while we were hunting for your victims. That's why you came to me—to spread enough confusion to make good your escape! But there's—"

Standing to one side, apparently still dazed, or pretending to be dazed as Colonel Griezz had accused, Monte had been inconspicuous. A second after Harper had caught his eyes, he had begun. His slender, delicate fingers, educated and agile, had reached out just once. Then he took a slight step or two back, and when he was ready, he waved a hand to Harper. In his other hand he held the service heat gun he had picked out of an officer's holster!

It was Harper who interrupted the Colonel's speech. He pointed to Monte and said,

"My friend is a deadly shot, Colonel. Raise your hands and be quick about it!"

The Colonel let out a squeal of dismay as he saw the gun in Monte's hand, but one of the officers jumped back and pulled out his own weapon. Monte scowled imperceptibly and his heat gun flashed into a thin, brilliant ray of action. The slender beam of yellow-gold heat hissed across ten feet of space and caught the officer's gun squarely in its barrel! Instantly the gun became a mass of molten metal. The officer cried out in pain and fell to the floor, clutching his hand.

"Not a bad shot," Monte observed, dryly. "Only trouble is I'm out of practice . . . might miss the next time—the gun, I mean."

HARPER was breathing heavily, trembling with impatience. "Come here, all of you!" he ordered, pointing to the AV system. The police officers, reluctant yet wary of the heat gun that followed their every move, crossed to where Harper indicated.

With quick movements, Harper removed the screen from the audi-visor, exposing its gleaming metal innards.

"Stick your hands inside!" Harper grated. "You first, Colonel. Just put your hands in among the wires and tubes—up to the wrist."

The Colonel stuck his hands in among the maze of wires and coils. One after another, the other officers followed him, until they were all standing around the AV machinery, their hands inside. Then Harper took one of the officer's heat guns from its holster, cocked it—

"No," he said. "Monte, you do it. This needs your expert touch. Just tangle the boys up a little."

With a wry smile, Monte stepped forward. He adjusted the lever of the heat gun until its deadly beam was as thin as a strand from a spiderweb. Then, stepping up the AV machine, he played the bright line of heat among the wires with infinite care, fusing them together, melting down tubes and coils without touching any of the hands that were slowly, surely being imprisoned in the metal.

After a few moments, it was done: the police officers were securely locked to the huge machine, hand-cuffed! Then Monte opened the door until the metal sheath along its edge touched the metal case of the AV. With two quick bursts he had welded the machine and the great door together! Then he took several strips that Harper had meanwhile torn from the fibreglass curtains and helped gag the officers. The helpless police rolled their eyes in eloquent fury as Harper and Monte left them.

Stefan, the butler, was waiting in the

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hallway, astonished by the scene he had glimpsed. Harper took him by the arm and went down the stairs with him.

"Listen to me, Stefan," he said, soberly. "You don't know much about me. You've only seen me the two times I brought Miss Lois home. You love her, don't you, Stefan?" The old man nodded, tearfully. "Then you've got to help me. I love her too, Stefan. She's in terrible danger and I'm going to try to bring her home again. Go back to your quarters. Keep the other servants away. No matter what you hear happening back in that room, if you do hear anything, don't help them get out. You know nothing of their being there, understand?"

"I understand, sir," the old man quavered. "I'll pray for you."

"Pray hard!" Harper muttered as he ran to the door. Outside, he and Monte raced down the steps to the file of police vehicles. They jumped into one of them, and with Harper at the wheel, the three-wheeled machine spun around and roared back up the road along which they had come.

"Now what?" said Monte.

"I'm going up to try to find that Lindite ship!"

"Find it? How?"

The sweat stood out on Harper's brow as he careened around a corner, narrowly missing two pedestrians.

"I don't know how," he said, tersely. "But I've got to take the one chance I have. I can't think straight anymore . . ."

THE police car sped furiously through an intersection and swerved at the last instant to avoid a head-on collision.

"You can't drive straight, either," Monte choked. "Where are we going?"

"Here!" said Harper, spinning the car sharply into the street that housed the Vhedy headquarters of the Tyuionian police. The car shot into the police garage and stopped inches away from the far wall. Harper leaped out and grabbed the Sergeant in charge by the arm.

"Quick!" he snapped. "Get me a plane! Official business!"

"Huh?" said the startled Sergeant. "What kind of business?"

"Not yours, stupid!" Harper roared in official rage. "Do I get that plane or do you hunt a new job tomorrow?"

The Sergeant glanced quickly at the police car, blinked, and evidently decided to retain his job.

"Yes, sir!" he clicked. "Into the elevator, please."

There were nine or ten police planes in the roof hangars. Harper strode to one and snapped his fingers.

"This one!"

"But . . . but there's no insignia on it, sir," the Sergeant said.

"Am I in uniform?" Harper demanded, sharply. "Maybe I don't want to be recognized!" He leaned over the instrument board, checked the fuel supply and found it at capacity. Then he revved the double motors and shut them off for a moment. He took Monte's hand and shook it. "So long for now, Monte," he said, quietly. "Take care of—"

Monte shook his hand loose in disgust.

"You must be kidding," he snorted. "Where the hell do you think you're going alone? I'm fed up playing solitaire!" And he climbed into the plane. Harper stood undecided for a moment, then grinned the least bit and climbed in beside Monte, taking the controls. He signalled to the Sergeant and started up the helicopter motor. But the blast of the revving had brought the hangar police running to the scene. They came on the gallop to the Sergeant demand-

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ing to know what was going on.

"Official business!" the Sergeant barked, raising his hand in salute as the plane rolled by him. Quickly, the other police lined up and saluted at attention with him.

THE sky was a black field sown with stars. Far off, one of the three moons of Tyuio circled endlessly. There were colored dots of light, too—the navigation lights of nightbound ships and planes, flitting on and off like beacons. Occasionally the wind brought the soft hum of other motors. The rest was silence.

"What was that chance you were thinking of, Cary?"

"Maybe the Lindite ship hasn't left yet."

Monte asked,

"Because if it had, the kid wouldn't have felt the compulsion to go to the ship?" and Harper nodded. "Maybe," said Monte, "it left before they got to it . . . or after they got to it . . . "

"It's a chance. That's why I wanted a police plane without any markings, fast enough to make the rounds of the gambling ships."

"How will you know if you've found it? And if you do find it—what then?"

Harper brushed his face wearily.

"I don't know . . . I don't know," he repeated, tonelessly. "All I know is that I must find her!" He sat there like a man turned to stone. Many miles away a string of lights outlined a ship. Beyond it were others, dimmer in the distance. "Monte," Harper said, presently, "how many of those big boats do you count? Just the gambling boats—the ones with the double blue light."

Monte leaned forward.

"Seven. Why?"

"Because there were seven this afternoon, too!"

"So what?"

"Max Green said the *Venus Sapphire* had left!"

"He ought to know. Maybe a new one came in."

Harper swung the plane into a sharp port bank and crowded the already full throttle.

"Maybe," said Harper. He glanced at the control board: they were eighty miles up. The gambling ships were space-anchored in a huge circle at that level. In a few moments the little police plane sped by the first of the vessels and for a fleeting instant the mingled sounds of gaiety rushed by and were lost. Another ship grew large and disappeared to the starboard. Then the hull of an old liner loomed. The plane dove in, turned on its copter motors and hovered in mid-air close by the ship's bow.

On the vessel's bow, emblazoned in twinkling blue lights, was its name: *The Venus Sapphire.*

"It came back!" Monte gasped.

Harper maneuvered the plane closer to the ship's hangar. The two men looked down to a deck crowded with people in evening dress. From the upper deck strains of music and laughter floated down. The plane inched in, and through the great, clear windows of the gaming room they could see hundreds of people at the various boards.

"Cary," said Monte, hoarsely, "we can't go in there. This is a trap—that's why it came back!"

A quiet, ironic laugh came from Harper.

"It never left," he said. "I just figured it out. That little Colonel Greizz gave me the answer about an hour too late." He tried to steer the plane, but Monte put a hand over Harper's and locked the controls.

Harper pulled his hands free.

"Monte," Harper said, "Lois is aboard this ship and trap or no trap I'm

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going in. You can pull out anytime. Take the plane back with you."

Wordlessly, Monte withdrew his hands from the wheel.

HARPER maneuvered the plane through the lock and landed easily on the hangar deck. He got out after Monte, nodded to an attendant whom he recognized as the man he had batted out that afternoon. The attendant didn't know Harper; the action had been too swift. For a moment, everything that had happened since that afternoon rose up in Harper's mind. It seemed unbelievable. It was as if years had passed.

When they came out on the upper deck, Monte gripped Harper's arm and stood beside him, leaning against the rail.

"Cary," he said, tensely, "you've got to tell me—what are you going to do?"

Harper shrugged.

"Something kept this ship from leaving tonight, and that something has given us time. If we can locate Lois or her brother . . . there are hundreds of people aboard, and we're the only ones who know this is a Lindite ship. Maybe we could stir them up to do something. Meanwhile, we can't be in much danger while they're around."

"What's your plan?"

"We'll separate here. I'll be playing at the four-wheels. No one knows you here, so you'll do a little snooping. If you get the slightest idea about where Lois is, come to my wheel and play on double-zero, double-black. Then meet me up here."

Harper lit a cigarette and walked away quickly. He descended to the middle deck and entered the gaming room. The place was in an uproar: somebody was riding a streak at the dice table and scores of people had gathered around to wish him luck. The player, a middle-aged man with a shiny bald head, kissed his wife for luck, as he gleefully howled, and rolled his entire stake. A loud chorus of disappointed groans rose, the dice went to another player and the crowd broke up.

Unobtrusively, Harper went to the four-wheels. The Martian croupier who had been there in the afternoon was gone, and in his place another red-haired Martian stood at the head of the open table. Harper bought some chips and began to play. He placed small stakes on the squares indiscriminately, winning once or twice and then losing back what he had won. He played lackadaisically, keeping his attention on the doors.

Once, from some women players near him he heard something that instantly interested him. One of the women mentioned a friend of hers who had supposedly lost large sums at the four-wheels.

"Personally," the woman said, deprecatingly, "I don't believe it, but what irritates me is the way she refused to answer any AV calls for the past two days."

Harper knew what that meant. Days later her friends would find that woman unaccountably missing: it was only too true that she had lost large sums . . . and then she had been offered a chance to get back double her losses . . .

Harper turned back from the door in time to see a pile of chips being put down on the square reserved for double-zero, double-black. He glanced up at Monte, placed his own bet, and when the wheels had stopped, he went out and climbed the stairs to the upper deck.

MONTE came after a few moments. Harper called to him from the shadows where he stood partly concealed, and Monte stood beside him.

"Went down to the lower deck,"

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Monte said in a subdued voice that betrayed his excitement. "Came across a little room there, sign outside said 'Crew Members Only'. Thought I'd have a look. I opened the door and shut it fast—four or five Jovians sitting inside, smoking long pipes. What got me was a big, metal-studded door in back. Seemed to me it led to engine room, so I went upstairs and found that the engine noises came from a spot thirty feet away! Couldn't be anything but a hidden room . . ."

Monte let his voice taper into silence as a lovely, dark-haired girl, escorted by a bearded man, walked by.

Harper waited, then asked,

"Did the Jovians recognize you?"

"Can't say. Maybe I wasn't fast enough. Too startled. Anyway, there's a restaurant galley between the lower and middle decks, close to the spot I figured was over the hidden room. Waiters passing in and out all the time, so I couldn't take too many chances. The galley was hot as hell. I figured it had to have ventilators and it did.

"I tore the top off a ventilator and there was a room down there, all right. With all the noise from the galley I couldn't hear much, but there was an argument going on. One of the voices was the most peculiar I ever heard—low, soft, but it carried marvelously. Other voice was muffled, but seemed angry. Heard him say they had to get away from Tyuio fast.

"The soft voice said they'd been working the territory so well they couldn't leave yet. Too many people having their fifty-hour deadline tonight. They expected maybe ten, fifteen more by morning.

"The other voice shouted something, then I heard what they'd done with the senior Van Horn. The Jovians caught him at the door, drugged him and put him in his own garage. By morning he would be out of it, he kept shouting, and the whole I.P. would be on its way here. He said the Lindites were too greedy, someday they'd overreach themselves.

"The soft voice started laughing, saying this ship was faster than any I.P. ship . . ."

Harper clutched Monte's arm and put his fingers to his lips. In a moment, the dark-haired girl and the bearded man sauntered by. The girl was laughing at something and the man kept saying,

"Please, dear . . ."

Then, just as Monte was on the point of resuming, the bearded man left the girl and started walking back, as if he had forgotten something. He walked directly to the shadows where Harper and Monte stood, and said, in a matter-of-fact voice,

"Am I correct in assuming that you gentlemen are looking for a Miss Lois Van Horn?"

In the sudden silence, Harper's voice came softly.

"Hello, Max," he said. "Thought I'd find you here."

Maxwell Green nodded and said,

"Follow me quietly. And in case you're thinking of saying anything to other passengers, remember that I can yank this beard off in a second . . . in which event I am Lieutenant Green of the Colonial I.P. and you are a wanted criminal."

SEVERAL feet away, to either side of them, giant Jovians had appeared in the semi-gloom of the upper deck. Evidently they had recognized Monte after all. Harper decided a gun battle here would be worse than useless.

They followed Green down to the lower deck, to the room with the sign, "Crew Members Only." Jovians were stolidly sitting about, the air heavy with smoke from their long, hooked pipes.

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In one wall of the room was the metal-studded door which Monte had mentioned.

At a signal from Green, one of the Jovians searched Harper and Monte and found the heat guns they had taken from the police. Green raised his eyebrows and said,

"I see how you got here. Colonel Greizz must be even less efficient than I thought."

He rapped on the studded door and went in, holding the door open for Harper and Monte. There was no one inside and for a moment Green seemed annoyed. Then he motioned the two men to sit down and sat down himself. The room was superbly furnished, carpets made of the fur-like Neptunian wool lay on the floor, the walls were paneled with black-grained Venusian woods. Green fished out his glasses and put them on, looking with interest at Harper.

"Can't wear these with the beard," he said, smiling. "The minute I put on these thick lenses, I'm Maxwell Green again, with a beard." He offered the cigar box, shrugged at their refusal and lit one himself.

"Tell me, Harper," he said, "how you discovered I was in this."

"What are you driving at?"

"I'll ask questions. I asked you one already."

"You can go to hell."

"Probably will, what's more," Green laughed. He added, "I've a deal to offer you, Harper, a deal you may like. But you won't accomplish anything sitting here and burning up."

Presently Harper said,

"It was Colonel Greizz that gave me the lead. I told him what I thought was the truth—Van Horn going to the bank, you calling the I.P., the Jovians coming for the globe. He only laughed at me, and he said that lies didn't necessarily succeed because they were bold . . ."

"Please go on."

"It didn't mean anything to me then. But when I saw the *Venus Sapphire* was still here, I realized that all the evidence I'd had that she had left was your word. That was all the evidence I had for anything I'd said! It all jelled then . . . and I saw that your lies had succeeded merely because they were so bold that they left no room for doubt."

"I see," said Green, thoughtfully. "I thought perhaps I had slipped up somewhere. Finding you in Tyuio threw me off my stride, I'll confess. You see, I didn't come here for you. My business was—well, you might say financial, chiefly."

"Whatever the Lindites pay you, said Harper, "won't make up for that day when you do slip. You'll go on selling out the I.P. and protecting the Lindites for just so long. And you'll probably be one of the richest men that ever died in the lethal chamber."

Green smiled fitfully.

"It should appeal to you, Harper. It's quite a gamble, you see, and the pay-off is enough, for instance, to make a hundred thousand dollar reward ridiculous. Men like you, calm, clear-headed, capable—"

"Let's hear the rest of it."

GREEN pursed his lips and made a deprecating gesture.

"You don't like it, do you? Well, hear me out. I'm on a spot, Harper, but my spot is your spot. I can't take you back to the I.P. anymore. In a way I'm sorry I ever started this whole thing. I spotted you at the Rhon-Vhedy Plaza hotel and I couldn't resist the try at nailing you. A regrettable mistake, but the set-up seemed perfect—you seeing the Van Horn girl, I knowing her brother was in deep to the Lindites

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here . . ."

He sighed,

"Well, that's water over the dam now. Even if no one believed you at the I.P. I couldn't afford to let you talk. And in spite of the fact that I hate you more than I've ever hated anyone, I recognize your ability and your worth. We need good men here. So, briefly, take it or leave it."

"Suppose I decide to leave it?"

"I should be very grateful. This gracious offer is not mine, you see. It seems that your doggedness and foolhardy courage has an appeal for the Lindites who employ me. They want you. But, should you refuse, the alternative would be what I proposed to do with you in the first place—feeding you to the atomic furnaces that run this ship."

"On the other hand," Harper said, "I might take your offer and then turn you in the first chance I got."

Maxwell Green flicked the ash from his cigar and his eyes met Harper's.

"Hardly. If you accept, you will stay aboard this ship and come with us to Lindar. Only the Lindites could then acclimatize you for the outer world again, and even then you would have to return to Lindar at least once every two years. Betrayal would end your chances of returning . . . and of living much longer . . ."*

Cary Harper rose and started pacing the room. Green watched him carefully, watched him exchange mute glances with Monte that were an admission of hopelessness. Then Harper said,

"What about Lois and her brother? Where do they fit in?"

"They don't. You may be amazed to learn that I had no intention even of allowing young Ralph Van Horn to be taken — once you brought the whole thing out into the open. The elder Van Horn didn't believe you, but if his son and daughter disappeared . . ." Green smiled again. "There will be other disappearances tonight. The truth will be known by tomorrow. Van Horn is powerful enough to make it very hot for us. It would be idiotic not to let his children alone now."

"You're lying, Green," Harper said, slowly.

"Don't be a fool! Compare it with the facts you have. Only you two men know I'm in this, correct? As far as the Van Horns are concerned, I was kidnaped by the Lindites. They saw me taken away by their Jovians. I arranged that because I wanted a foolproof exit. If I had wanted either the girl or her brother, I could have had them taken, too. Correct? The fact that I didn't shows I was interested only in getting out of it. When I return, I'll have an excellent yarn to tell, you may be sure."

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* Scientists have long been interested in the repeated stories that the Lindites have discovered a way of acclimatizing humans to the outer world, even though the process is possible only upon those who have spent but a short time upon Lindar.

Lindites are reputed to use this means as their way of retaining those who aid them. Martians, Jovians, Venusians, Humans, etc., are first taken to Lindar for a brief period—enough to make imperative their return at certain intervals to Lindar. After each visit, possible only by trusted confederates who are undoubtedly well paid for their tie to the world of Lindar, they are again acclimated to the outside world.

It is believed that if the Lindites could extend this process, eventually they could solve the problem of bringing in enough free-willed help. Competent authorities have denied this possibility, and indeed, the Lindites themselves seem to know it can never be done because of the ever-growing necessity for their strange atmospheric element as residence increases.

There has also been conjecture as to whether this process is the one used by the Lindites in their rare excursions to the outer world. It is undoubtedly true that these excursions take place, as witness the several instances of capture of Lindites aboard their vessels, cunningly hidden beyond detection of any instruments, and discovered only by the methodical taking apart of entire vessels which were known to have a Lindite aboard them.—Ed.

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"So they go free, eh?"

"Certainly. They may even have been taken back to Tyuio by now—"

ONE of the wall panels had slid open, and through it had stepped a figure so strange and compelling that Harper stared at it as if he were petrified. There, returning Green's low bow, stood a man who looked so old that he seemed as ageless as history. Of medium build, with a small, wrinkled face and eyes that were black and fathomless, he appeared as fragile and delicate as old china. Every vein stood out in his white hands, and the skin of his face was the color of parchment.

He wore a multi-colored robe which reflected every particle of light in a magnificent, ever-changing sheen that seemed to be made of myriad diamonds and precious stones placed together in a mosaic. He gathered the robe around him as if he were cold, and sat down in the chair Green had vacated.

It was apparently an eternity later that Harper knew he was in the presence of a Lindite, one of the fabulous beings of interplanetary lore, beings about whose ability to leave Lindar scientific controversies had raged for years. This was one of the last of the Lindites, one of less than a thousand of his kind, fighting for survival.

He regarded Harper and Monte with interest and said,

"I am afraid Mr. Green is mistaken in some of the things he said." His voice struck Harper and Monte simultaneously: this undoubtedly was the strange voice that Monte had overheard earlier. It was incredibly low, sometimes like a sigh, other times like a note from an old violin, but it filled the room with its power. "I have followed your conversation with interest," he added, "and I must dissuade you from any false promises."

"They have not promised falsely, Lanna," said Green. "We have—"

"It is you who have made the false promises," said the Lindite, indicating Green. "The young man you speak of, Ralph Van Horn, and his sister, will not be permitted to leave this ship."

Green appeared bewildered by the Lindite's words.

"You cannot mean that Lanna, not only because I have explained to you the great necessity for returning them, but because you have no claim on the girl."

Sitting there stonily, Harper heard the Lindite say,

"There is no necessity in this universe, save the necessity for Lindar to live on. As for my claim on the girl, she accepted the globe for her brother's freedom, and she failed. She therefore belongs to Lindar."

Suddenly Harper leaped up.

"What does he mean, Max?" he cried. "It can't be that Lois . . . "

Green's face had blanched. He nodded quickly to Harper and said:

"That's exactly what it does mean. The girl took the three tests with the globe, gambling her own freedom for her brother's!"

"You can't do this!" Harper shouted in a frenzy. "You've got to let her go!"

"Shut up, Harper!" Green cried, facing the Lindite. "Listen to me, Lanna. I have served you long and well, but now you are placing my life—all our lives—in jeopardy. The I.P. is strong, it is powerful, and if they ever get a lead to me I'm through! They'll torture the truth out of me if they have to!"

"You will be strong," said the Lindite, implacably. "You are a clever man and you will work out your salvation. Together with your new comrade, Mr. Harper, you will be able to

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stand against their suspicion, for was it not he who first told them of our ship?"

"Just try me!" Harper cried. "I'll help Green with an alibi that'll send him to a place where there's nothing but cyanide fumes and a dozen official witnesses! And if I go to the furnace now, he knows that he won't be far behind!"

"No!" Green muttered, horror-stricken. "You must reconsider, Lanna. I am a valuable man. I have served you too well for this!"

"Men like you and Harper can be bought," said the Lindite, softly. "Or they can be forced, impressed into our service. But Lindar needs slaves, slaves who come of their own free will, and these cannot be bought. Slaves are the life-blood of Lindar, and they must be murtured into their slavery carefully. They cannot be bought, and each is more valuable to us than a hundred free-willed confederates like you or this Mr. Harper, who are bound to us only by their need to return to Lindar briefly, taking our drugs and fleeing again, thinking of ancient Lindar as a curse and abomination."

SICK at heart and ghastly-looking, Green covered his face with his hands. Suddenly he screamed.

"You can't do this to me! If you had left when I told you, this would never have happened!" It was apparent then that Green's had been the other voice that had urged the Lindite to leave, in the conversation Monte had overheard. The same terror that had inspired that plea made him quiver now. "Your greed will catch up with you yet!" he shouted. "You must let them go!"

The Lindite hadn't stirred. He turned his head away from Green and intoned gently:

"I did not want to tell you this, Mr. Green. You forced me to speak the truth. Lindar has its honor as it has its need. You must have known that in a choice between any number of free men and a slave that we would take the slave."

All at once Harper got up and stood before the Lindite.

"Am I, too, valuable to you as a slave?" he asked, softly.

The Lindite nodded.

"If the girl had succeeded in her test with the globe, would she have been set free together with her brother?"

"The honor of Lindar is inviolate."

"Then would you stake my freedom as a stake against the lives of my friends—my friend Monte, the girl I love, and her brother?"

"Cary! You can't!" Monte cried. "I won't let you!"

Harper caught Monte and thrust him away savagely. Haggard, he stared at the Lindite, waiting for the answer.

"I never knew," said the Lindite, quietly, "that a man whose life had been spent in gambling would be fool enough to gamble for his life."

"I have no life without her," said Harper. "I want to be with her, whether in the hell of Lindar or in this world. It would not be worth living if I had to go on helping your kind enslave mine."

The Lindite rose and pressed his hand against a panel. It slid open and the Lindite went through.

"Come," he said, motioning to Harper and Monte. "You will take the Drink of Honor."

AS HARPER followed the aged Lindite through the panel, the lights that had been on the other side went out. In the darkness, the Lindite robe glowed with a soft phosphorescence and Harper followed it. He felt himself

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walking through a room, and it seemed to him that there were people in the room, people on all sides of him, but he couldn't see them. He could almost feel their presence, hear their breathing. . . . He shook off the delusion.

When there was light again, Harper turned behind him and saw that a door had closed behind, so silently that he hadn't heard. He was now completely alone with the Lindite in a small, circular room that was completely bare, save for a table the top of which was deeply convex. It seemed to be formed of a glistening metal that reflected the light of the Lindite's robe.

The Lindite touched his hand to the table. The convex, hemispheric top parted and a tiny platform rose from the interior of the table. There were two objects on the platform. One was a small white globe, the other a fragile, shallow glass. The Lindite silently picked up the glass and held it out to Harper.

"This," said the Lindite, "is our Drink of Honor."

Harper took the glass.

"One thing more," he said. "My friend in the other room—surely there is some way to separate his fate from mine? He came only because of me, and if he could—"

"Impossible."

Harper looked at the glass. There were only a few drops of liquid in it, pale red drops that rolled against the transparent sides. To drink them was to make an irrevocable bargain . . . the bargain that Lois had made and lost. His eyes lifted to the white globe . . .

"There is little time," came the Lindite's voice.

Harper raised the glass to his lips and drank.

The strange liquid was like a searing acid. The tiny drops burned like fire, coursing down his throat, tearing at his chest. Harper gulped the air in hoarse breaths. His eyes dimmed, and through the mist that covered them, he could see the wavering figure of the imperturbable Lindite, like a picture painted on a veil.

Then the Lindite looked at the white globe, and as if in response to an inaudible command, the sphere rose evenly from the table and came floating through the air toward Harper. Harper held out his hand and let the empty glass fall softly to the carpeted floor, and the globe came to rest in his open palm.

"I must ask your pardon for the strength of your drink," said the Lindite. "It was a concentrate, because you have but a single hour to fulfill our bargain. Now you may leave here. The ship is yours."

THE Lindite pointed in the direction from which they had come, and as Harper turned, he saw that the door had opened. But instead of the darkness through which he had walked, there was now light. He went to the doorway and instantly withdrew. There were people in that room, many of them, just as he had felt. For a moment it seemed less important to wonder why they had been in darkness, why they had been silent—and were still silent—than it was to conceal the white globe.

For that alone had become paramount. Through the numbness that had grown around him, starting from a white-hot core deep inside, a core that still burned from the liquid's path, Harper knew one thing above all others: he had to hide the globe from everyone.

Clutching the globe in his right hand, he buried the hand deep in a pocket of his coat. Thoughts were racing through

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his mind, thousands of swift conjectures, of possibilities and alternatives, and over everything, he felt the great weight of one oppressive thought, the knowledge of what depended on his success. The globe and failure. . . failure and the globe. . . revolving in his brain like a pinwheel, flashing, burning, destroying everything else.

Like a man in a dream, he staggered to the door again and stepped through, and it occurred to him that the room was filled with strangers, and he had to keep it from them, to hide every trace, every visible shred of evidence of what had happened to him. He had to be Mr. Harper, walking jauntily through one of the ship's lounges.

And yet this was no lounge. These were no passengers. These were men and women, dressed in various costumes —this one in a business suit, that one in white sports clothes, another in night-clothes and a robe gathered about him. They were silent, morose, staring people, sitting together and saying nothing. It was as if Harper had been stunned into immobility himself, and with it had come deafness. . .

But this was the room through which he had passed, he remembered. This was the room that had been dark, the one between the proposal of the bargain and its consummation. Then all at once, Harper knew. This was the room in which were hidden the victims of the Lindites, the fresh, living corpses that had been harvested by the weeks of Lindite work in the vicinity of Tyuio!

And these were the people, the unspeaking and unspoken to slaves of Lindar, hidden from his sight before he had taken the Drink of Honor and now freed to his gaze, now that he too was bound to Lindar. These were the people to whom the darkness and the light were of no consequence, who had heard him pass and said nothing.

If all this was so, then here in this room. . . Harper's eyes wandered until he saw them. Seated on a straight-backed chair was Ralph Van Horn, and not far away, but not facing him, seemingly not even conscious of his existence, was his sister Lois!

FOR an instant, Harper felt the impulse to cry out to them, to shout and run to them, but something conquered the impulse. He had to be natural, to act as if nothing had happened, and he could say nothing. He walked calmly across the room and stopped before the girl. After an interminable pause, she looked up at him.

She knew him; Harper saw that at once. Her eyes traveled over him, lit for an instant with the gleam of recognition, then her gaze fell away. She sat dressed in a gown of black satin, radiant, yet lifeless and silent. Harper wanted to empty his bursting heart to this girl who had so insanely gambled away her life, but he felt it was impossible for him to utter a word.

He turned away and the paneled wall opened for him. He entered the room where he had met the Lindite. Monte and Maxwell Green were still there. Harper halted momentarily, conscious of the fear and fascination with which they regarded him. As he tried to walk by them, Monte took him by the arm.

"Cary—you didn't do it?"

"Do what? Take that idiotic gamble?" Harper laughed. "Not after I got a good look at some of those people who failed."

Green croaked at him.

"So you took the easy way?" he sneered, his thick-lensed eyes darting everywhere. "Turned smart, eh?" He came forward and spat out, "Not you, sucker! What are you holding in that hand that's in your pocket?"

A wave of helplessness came over

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Harper. All he could think of was denying Green's words, though he knew it was useless. His hand only clutched the globe more tightly, and blindly, he ran from the room into the little chamber where the Jovians still sat. He rushed by them and out to the deck, climbing up to the dark top-side.

And here, alone, he stood against the rail and breathed in the cool night air, filling his choking lungs. Everything seemed to have changed. The brightness of the stars, the quartered moon, the be-jeweled great shadow that was Tyuio, these things were now distant, remembered from a vague past. The present was filled with a great urgency, a need to fulfill a task that burned in his brain.

How quiet it was on the ship. From the stern of the upper deck he could hear the sharp explosions of a motor as a party of visitors left the ship's hangar in a plane. There were still people below in the gaming room, but Harper knew that in an hour or little more, there would be hardly any of them left. And in a little less than an hour, all the time that was left to him . . .

He realized then that he had been staring at the globe all the time he had been on deck. He kept staring at it, and after a moment it rose from his hand and remained in mid-air, an inch over his outstretched palm. Harper remained motionless and the globe hung, moment after moment, revolving slowly on an invisible axis.

From this moment on the test begins. It's still there . . . holding . . . it must hold . . . must . . . must . . . it's wavering! What will I do . . . now . . . back up . . . almost fell then . . . must hold . . . how much longer . . . how much time is gone . . . I can't fail now . . . this means everything . . . the stakes are too great . . . Lois . . . Lois . . . we're all in this now . . . holding . . . how much longer . . . I can't . . . I can't . . . can't . . .

The globe fell to the deck with a sharp thud and lay still. Harper clung heavily to the rail, completely exhausted. His body was filled with pain, his mind was blank. Sweat poured down his face until his eyes were filled and great sobs came from him.

LITTLE by little, thoughts returned. It had been easy at first. He had held the globe well. What had happened? He looked at the globe and suddenly kneeled and picked it up. It shimmered in his hands with a strange inner light, and as he kept his fearful gaze on it, it seemed to resolve itself into a head. And then he saw a mouth appearing, smiling cynically at him, and he heard its cynical voice . . .

"You begin to recognize the enormity of your task, Mr. Harper."

It was the Lindite who had spoken. He had come out of nowhere, and he stood beside Harper at the rail, the wind whipping his cloak about his frail figure.

"I admire your courage," his flute-like voice continued, almost compassionately. "But it is wasted. Your fate abandoned you when our paths crossed in Uranus. But you did not know that? You did not know that it was we of Lindar who had you branded a criminal?"

The Lindite smiled sadly.

"Consider. You are wanted for political intrigue and assault. Your political intrigue consisted merely of aiding in the overthrow of the rulers of Uranus, the rulers who were bound to us. You did not know that, did you? But our Mr. Green was there, you remember. At the time you thought he represented the I.P. in trying to quell the rebellion, and when he arrested you one day, you fought him, and made yourself liable

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for assault charges.

"But our Mr. Green was there to protect the interests of Lindar. We failed then, and later, when the I.P. recognized the new rulers of Uranus, you were pardoned for your part in the intrigue. You would have been a free man then, instead of a hunted criminal, if the assault charges against you had been removed.

"But we told Mr. Green to keep the charges in force. You fled from planet to planet, until finally you came to Tyuio, and our paths crossed again. Consider then, how fate abandoned you and gave you to us. For if the I.P. had ever known that Mr. Green was ours, you would again have been free . . . as you never will be again . . ."

The Lindite began to move away, and his voice floated to Harper on the dying wind.

"There is little time . . . hurry!"

He was gone.

His words had struck Harper with crushing force. At last, too late, Harper understood everything. Even at the time when he had first met Green, the miserable traitor had been in alien employ. At every step of the way there had been freedom, if only Harper had known in time. And now that it was too late . . . What did all this matter? What did anything matter? There was something to be done yet! He had to fight! There was still a chance if he could fight!

HARPER held the globe away from him. He suddenly pulled his hand from under it. It hung suspended. It was so simple, after all. He had held it there before . . . how long? Not long enough, or he would have been released. But it could be done! Here, practising, he had held it for longer than a minute, surely!

Suddenly he reached out and grabbed the globe, hiding it. Something had moved in the darkness, there near one of the funnels. Harper slowly advanced until he made out a crouching figure.

"Cary," came Monte's voice. "There's something—"

"Get away!" Harper snarled. "Get away from me!"

Monte came out of his hiding place, talking swiftly, trying to explain, but Harper rushed in and with a single blow sent Monte sprawling to the deck. He stood over his friend, bewildered and enraged all at once, unable to understand what had made him strike Monte, yet unable to say a word. He had no time to explain. He had to be alone.

He ran down the deck to the bow. There was no one in sight now.

I've got to do it this time . . . it's simple . . . all right . . . I say to myself I'm doing it . . . I've begun . . . it's holding . . . it's holding . . . it will hold this time . . . Lois . . . I can see her face . . . lost . . . we're all . . . lost . . . it's slipping! There . . . hold up . . .

His heart was beating like a hammer, each beat an endless second on the road to eternity, his mind on fire, his eyes glazed, intent on the sinister globe that floated on air.

Lord, I've gambled before . . . but never like this, you fool . . . you are a fool . . . hold it! . . . fool . . . fool . . . why can't I get her face out of my mind . . . how much time now . . . it keeps getting lower . . . raise it . . . fool . . . all the time Green was after me I was free . . . her face . . . I'll see it always . . . we'll be together . . . hold! . . . together in a living hell . . . I could have gotten away . . . he'd have given me to the I.P. but if I had known it wouldn't have mattered . . . they're all depending on me now . . . all. Monte . . . her brother . . . Lois . . . I'm going to hell . . . fight! fight!

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. . . fool . . . Lord it keeps slipping . . . I've got to . . . they're all depending . . .

But the globe had fallen again.

HARPER had gone to his knees, his body limp with fatigue, one hand hanging over the rail. Still the thoughts knifed through his reeling brain, repeating over and over again insistently that he had to win, that the stakes were too great to lose now. Picture after picture welled up in his consciousness. He was filled with despair such as he had never known. He was failing! One last chance remained, and he knew now that he was lost, and with him, the others.

He lay there, unable to move, and felt the shadow come between him and the star-studded sky.

"Monte!" he gasped.

"Yes, Monte!" came the harsh answer. "You asked for it, sucker! I kept telling you over and over but you wouldn't listen. Now you know!"

Monte wheeled and walked away, then suddenly he returned.

"Or maybe," Monte grated, "you haven't heard? Maybe the Lindite didn't tell you the whole thing. Maybe he's waiting until you've tried for the third time." He stuck his head down to where he could look into Harper's eyes. "Your little girl friend put one over on you! She never took their gamble or their drink! Her part of the bargain was to make you believe she did—because the Lindite wanted you, and he knew that was the only way he'd get you!

"You hear me, don't you?" Monte cried. "All she ever wanted was her brother's freedom, sucker! She didn't want any part of a criminal gambler. When she came here, the Lindite offered her her brother's life against yours and she grabbed the chance! Grabbed it without a second thought, do you hear?"

He stood erect and held a hand up.

"Listen!" he cried.

A woman's voice lifted high and clear in lilting laughter.

"That's her!" Monte laughed, sneeringly. "You recognize that voice, don't you? The voice that said 'I love you' and you believed it! Listen to her laugh! She's going home now, and her brother's with her!"

The woman's voice was like a knife in Harper's heart. He listened to Monte in slow comprehension, at first unable to move, then unwilling. It couldn't have been Lois's voice . . . and yet . . .

"But I saw her there among them!" Harper cried out. He was pleading with Monte now, begging him to unsay what he had said.

"You don't know what you saw!" Monte grated. "They sat her in there and told her to say nothing . . . and you were doped up with that lousy drink they'd given you! You're through, sucker! You were willing to drag all of us down with you, me included!"

He jutted his chin forward.

"Take a poke at me now, tough guy! Go ahead—sell me out and then swing at me! What are you waiting for? You're through and you know it! And while you can still remember anything, remember this—that fall guy Monte woke up at last! You hear me? I'm safe! I took their proposition! I'm going in with them and I'm going to live happily ever after while you're rotting away on Lindar! You taught me that, sucker! Watch out for number one! So long!"

After awhile his footsteps had died away.

LITTLE by little Harper's mind cleared, like a slate that had been wiped clean. He could feel the wind on his face again, and his breath came

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evenly. He rose from the deck and stood against the rail, and then he was laughing quietly. But the pain was gone. Everything was gone. His reason for living and for fighting was gone. It was all over then, over in two chances, not three. That third chance had never come, after all. The fight against time, against odds, had been lost before it began.

The laughter healed him, made him whole again. All his life he had gambled, and he knew sometimes one lost. All right then, lost. It was something to know that the game had been crooked all along. One had no friends in this world, one had only one's self.

His laughter rang clear and sharp now. He had felt a little pang, and he knew what it meant. His time limit was almost up; it was time for that third test. The drug they had given him didn't understand that he had lost already. Mechanically, it was reacting on his will, telling him he had to fulfill his bargain to the letter. Tears were rolling down his cheeks as he laughed.

He held the globe carelessly in his hand, then tossed it up in the air. Halfway down, he cried out: "Stop!"

The globe stopped in mid-air!

Harper looked at it quizzically. He knew his will was still telling the globe to remain where it was, and the globe responded. He thought to himself that he would like the globe to spin as it lay in midair, and before the thought was finished, the globe was spinning!

Then it was describing small circles, then larger ones, then it hopped up and down, falling at times within an inch of the deck only to swoop up almost out of sight. Harper found he could control it with his slightest thought, and he thought up still more complicated maneuvers and the globe responded instantly.

It wasn't until some time later that Harper became aware of a new sensation. He couldn't describe it at first. He thought his feet seemed lighter, a foolish thought. It was like being drunk a little . . .

Then suddenly Harper realized what had happened and he stood there stunned. *He had held the globe in mid-air for longer than a minute!* He had won against the test in his third try! Now he understood the feeling that had come to him, the sickening sensation in his chest, the light-headedness, the ease with which he could breathe again . . . freedom! *It was freedom again!*

He couldn't understand it. Slowly, he turned to face the globe again. It was still hovering, and he remembered that his last command, as it were, to the globe had been for it to remain in mid-air. Evidently whatever strange power he had suddenly acquired still persisted. He held out his hand and the globe leaped into his palm.

He stood there, trying to bring order to his confused brain. He was free—and then he remembered that his freedom also meant the freedom of Lois and Monte and young Van Horn, and in spite of the surge of exultant power he felt, anger burned in him like a flame. He would make certain that his victory remained his alone!

IT was as if his thoughts had conjured them into being—for as Harper started forward, the shadowy figures of the three emerged before him! Before Harper could speak, the aged Lindite had come among them. His face was expressionless, the thin sheets of parchment-like skin barely moving as he spoke. He bowed and said softly:

"You have our congratulations, Mr. Harper. You and your friends are free to go."

Harper looked wildly from one to the other, then took a step back and

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laughed.

"I have no friends!" he cried savagely. "I'm leaving here alone!"

"Cary, listen to me," Monte began. "You—"

"No you don't!" Harper snarled. "You made your choice—all of you!" His furious gaze traveled to each of them. "You, Lois, tried to sell me out without giving me a chance—and you, Monte, forgot that maybe I could win a gamble after all!" He sucked in his breath. "You can stop putting that act on, Lois!" he spat. "Your friend Monte told me where I stood in this. And now—so long!"

The Lindite's frail hand reached out and held Harper.

"No, Mr. Harper," he said, softly. "You do not understand. We made a bargain and you won, and no matter how the bargain was won, it must hold."

"You mean they've got to go free?" Harper cried.

The Lindite shook his head.

"Not unless you so desire it. But you must know what you desire, and ignorance would alter our bargain." A vaguely bitter trace of a smile flitted across the ancient face. "I must ask you to listen to your friend. Then you may choose."

"I've chosen already!"

"Fool!" said the Lindite, bitterly. "Do you think it was you who won your freedom? Do you not yet realize that it was this loyal friend of yours who was the instrument that made your victory possible?"

"No one made it possible!"

But suddenly Harper was quiet, breaking off as he remembered how strangely his complete control of the globe had come. He hadn't been able to fathom it. He felt lost, bewildered again.

"Monte?" he repeated, softly. "Monte?"

"I had to do it this way, Cary. Don't you see I lied to you because it was the only way?"

Monte was beside him then, holding his arm in the old way, speaking quietly, letting the words pour out.

"We used to have a motto, Cary. 'Makes No Difference' we used to say. It was a pretty good description of the way I'd taught you to feel about things, because we had to in the kind of life we knew. That's why I didn't want to see you falling in love. Men like us couldn't let anything matter. It had to be the run of luck, good or bad, and just the two of us to take the bad because we knew how to take it . . ."

A great aching began to well up within Cary Harper as he listened. His eyes rested on the trembling form of the girl. She wasn't listening to Monte . . . her gaze was still vacant and unseeing . . .

"There used to be a Cary Harper I knew, a guy who could play a fortune on the turn of a card or the spin of a wheel. He could laugh when he went broke. They said he was great because he was cold, because he had a stone heart and cold water in his veins—but he was great because he was boss of his destiny and destiny didn't matter!

"But tonight that Cary Harper was gone. I watched him, spying on him, yes, and I saw him playing with a little white globe. He could hold it when he was trying it out, but when he decided it was the test, somehow he couldn't anymore . . . And I've been around, Cary, and I knew what it meant. I realized that for the first time, Cary Harper was playing for stakes that made a difference! He couldn't afford to lose! Instead of the cold, calm gambler, there was just a nervous wreck of a kid—a kid just a few years older than another named Ralph Van Horn . . .

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"So I did the only thing I could. I lied to him, taunted him. I had to make him believe nothing mattered anymore, not the stakes, not his fate or anyone else's . . . so that he could gamble again . . . and win . . . win the stakes that meant more to him than his life if he knew it. . . ."

HARPER had no words. He had been standing, his face buried in his hands, completely overwhelmed, unable to speak. Now he took Lois in his arms and kissed her. She made no move. Her eyes were full on him, and she breathed only his name, as if it were a distant memory.

"There is no time left," came the Lindite's fluting voice. "This ship is about to leave. You must go now."

As Harper looked up, he heard the tread of heavy feet advancing along the deck. Two Jovians were slowly walking toward the group, and between them walked Maxwell Green.

Not a word was spoken until Green had reached the group, then he said slowly, staring at the Lindite with deadly eyes:

"There's been a slight change in plans."

From the other sides of the deck, climbing up the ladders and blocking the exits, came other Jovians, their huge bodies swinging from side to side as they closed in. There was no questioning the meaning of the scene. The Jovians' pale, death's-head faces betrayed their allegiance to Green.

"Honor forbids a change in plans, Mr. Green," the Lindite said, his voice very thin and gentle.

"Honor be damned! I told you it was suicide for me to allow this boy and his sister to disappear under the circumstances . . . but you can't let them go if Harper is going with them. It means curtains for me." Green's face was a dull mask of sullen fury. "And these Jovians understand. They're in the same boat in more ways than one."

"The Jovians matter as little as you do, Mr. Green. Have you forgotten your own very special circumstances? This is perhaps a slower, but assuredly a more certain suicide. You cannot rebel."

As Harper regarded Green, he realized that only violence would decide the issue. He had never seen Green this way. Green's right hand had edged into a pocket where a heavy weight sagged suggestively, and Harper could see the tremor that went through Green's right arm. The man's face was demoniacally distorted and his every move was careful and calculated.

"I haven't forgotten that little talk you gave me about the value of slaves to Lindar," he said, dully. "Maybe, if we got back to Lindar with this cargo, maybe it wouldn't be so bad for us even if you weren't with us." His hand trembled again, as he waited for the Lindite to speak. "All right then," Green whispered. "You died on the way, you understand, and we buried you in space . . ."

In the silence that had enveloped the ship, the Lindite stepped forward, smiling gently.

He died with the smile still on his face. From Green's pocket, a hidden heat gun spat its vicious streak of light into that frail body. Slowly, the little form slumped to the deck, the glittering, age-old eyes open, the long, thin mouth stretched into an eternal, last mockery of a smile . . .

And then Cary Harper struck!

DESPERATION, fury, heartbreak all these and something more were in his first blow, for they alone would have left him easy prey for the deadly weapon in Green's hands, and the wait-

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ing strength that lay in the ready, swinging arms of the huge Jovians. But for an instant after the ancient Lindite died, and while the paralytic magic of his mocking smile still lingered, Harper knew what he had to do. And it was that instant, and the something more—the hope, perhaps, but certainly the calmness, the coldness which had come over him, all that was in his first blow.

For Harper bent his supple body forward and hurled the white globe that still lay in his hand. The globe flashed out like a white streak and cracked solidly against Green's skull.

After that it was like a horrible nightmare, but one in which the dreamer alone was awake. For as Maxwell Green pitched heavily to the deck, falling close to the Lindite, the white globe darted back to Harper's hands, and then, without touching them, fired itself across the space between Harper and the Jovian who had attempted to take out Green's weapon! It cracked against the Jovian's outstretched fingers and broke them, whipped up and hurled itself, like some evil, conscious projectile, against the forhead of the Jovian, spreading the stuff of his brains in a gushing flow to the deck.

And Harper stood there a moment longer, gaunt, furious, yet with a slight preoccupied frown on his face, his will directing the murderous vengeance of the globe as it dealt out death. Again and again the globe leaped in twisting arcs, smashing down the Jovians before they could attempt to move.

By then, Monte had seized the weapon from the prostrate form of Green, had gripped young Van Horn's arm and pushed him headlong across the deck. Harper swept the girl into his arms, raised her and followed Monte.

And the globe, hovering over the deck, swept back and forth in contracting and expanding circles. All the way to the ship's hangar it spun in blinding, unerring flight, keeping the four within its circumference as free as it had almost enslaved them.

As they entered the ship's hangar, several attendants rushed at them from behind the shelter of the launch. Those who ducked the wrath of the white globe met a single flash from the gun in Monte's steady hand.

After that, the *Venus Sapphire* lay quietly, while a little, unmarked police plane took off from her locks. The plane circled the flickering blue lights of the Lindite ship and started away. Monte pointed to her.

"She's leaving, Cary . . ." The ship was a thin, slow streak of light against the weird, faint haze of dawn. ". . . leaving with those poor souls aboard her, lost forever."

Harper watched the *Venus Sapphire* turning her bow into the void, and great sobs of laughter choked him. He held up his hand, freeing the white globe. After a moment it leaped away, in-

"Now don't go asking him any silly questions. Just give him a rifle and put him in the cavalry."

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stantly lost to sight, speeding toward the slowly moving target . . .

They heard the sharp report the white globe made when it tore through the hull of the ship, crashing again and again through the controls, destroying the blasters, smashing the rudders, hurling itself through the bowels of the ghost that had been the *Venus Sapphire.*

The ship had stopped moving. It lay in the morning sky above Tyuio, helpless prisoner in space, unable to move . . .

The tears that had fallen from Cary Harper to the lovely face of the girl who lay in his arms opened her eyes. He kissed her, and somehow, he knew everything was going to be all right.*

*. . . and at least half the success of these experiments was due to the miraculous saving of these doomed people from the *Venus Sapphire.* These prisoners of the Lindites, never having been to Lindar, still sound in health, were experimented upon for months, and every one was finally cured. Today, scarcely a hospital in the System is without serum to counteract the effects of the Lindite Drink of Honor.

But the essence of the Lindite strength lay not in their drug, but in their diabolically clever analysis of human frailty. Not content with building a system that rested on human weakness, they went further and put the key to their success in the same method. For they realized that humans, knowing they faced the Ultimate Gamble, would invariably be shattered against the nerve-breaking walls of this test. Where could will or reason operate when the mind was filled only with fear . . .

. . . on the other hand, though the Lindites have since had their activities drastically reduced, little is known about them still. A Lindite corpse found on the *Venus Sapphire* was too decomposed to offer a good subject for autopsy. Another subject, a renegade I. P. Lieutenant Maxwell Green, confessed aid to the Lindites, offered his body to scientific research upon his death. Unfortunately, shortly before the expiration of the limit of his "tolerance" to ex-Lindite atmosphere, he escaped from jail, and is now presumably either alive on Lindar, or dead elsewhere.

It is certain that the marauding of the Lindites is now almost at an end, and within the next few years, due to these new discoveries . . . etc., etc. —Ed.

SPACE-FLIGHT 790 A.D.

THE very first known story dealing with a voyage to another planet and describing the people and a hero's adventures there, was written about 790 A.D., in Constantinople by Bilbassus, the Grammarian, for the amusement of the Emperor and his court. No particle of the original story exists, but fragments of it were incorporated in later writings. Putting the several pieces together we got most of the story.

A young man, Necos was his name, refuses to marry the wealthy, high-born, but not so lovely or sweet tempered bride selected by his father. Her powerful family seeks revenge. A magician helps the boy escape by loaning him a great basket and a package of magic seeds and teaching the youth a powerful charm. Every time the boy drops a seed and utters the charm properly the basket carries him a thousand miles in any direction he points.

He has been warned not to fall asleep while in the basket but does so nevertheless after many weary days of traveling thru the air. In consequence Necos lands on another world, which one is not specified, and there is immediately attacked by a people with immense heads, tiny legs and four arms. They seem to have no bodies at all, just head, legs and arms.

Necos defends himself valiantly but in the end, overwhelmed by their number, is taken prisoner. Here we run into a great gap in the story. The next time we see Necos it is at the court of a great king who was at war with the people who captured the Byzantians, and defeating them, rescued Necos. These people are much like Earthlings except that their skin has a golden hue and a haloish light surrounds them. Necos falls in love with the beautiful golden-bodied daughter of the king's younger brother.

Another gap during which the land that gave Necos refuge is evidently overrun by the soldiers of a merciless tyrant. Necos and the king's brother and a few soldiers are fugitives within the conqueror's camp. After weary days some of them are captured and the remnant of the little band splits up, hoping this way to escape.

Another gap. Necos has wondered considerably seeking his golden princess. He meets a magician who tries to help him find the girl the Earthling loves. They fail because a greater magician is evidently in the employ of the tyrant. It is decided that Necos must return to Earth to engage the services of the magician who helped him escape from Constantinople. The two men of magic together should be able to successfully combat the new king's warlock.

One more gap. Necos starts out on the return voyage and there our fragments end. We hope he got to Earth, got the magician he needed, got back to the other world, got the girl, and here's where we've got to stop.

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Gold coins were raining down in a torrent when Mr. Eee turned for a final look

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MR EEE CONDUCTS A TOUR

Mr. Eee didn't know much about being a guide, but he certainly showed his party some fantastic things on this odd world!

By Don Wilcox

INTRODUCING myself, I'm Mr. Eee. Pleased to meet you. Shake hands?—sure. But don't go slapping me on the back. I'm suspicious of back-slappers.

My story?

Well, we were on our way to Jupiter. You see, I had this job for the STS—the Solar Travel Service. This was my first assignment. I was to conduct these six Big Shots, members of the Space-wide Booster Club, on a good-will jaunt to the big, far-away planet.

What a darb of a set-up! Six of the loudest, self-inflatedest, back-slapping-est big guns from the interplanetary

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headlines were mine to guide. Mine to conduct to the Capital City of the planet they had never visited. Mine to —ah, this would be pie!

"When in doubt," the motto of the STS guides ran, "bluff."

Six Boosters, the pilot and yours truly made up the party of eight—and *I* was the boss. With green uniform and gold braid. Not bad, considering that a few weeks earlier I had been a jobless man-about-planets, a space-ship stowaway riding the baggage compartments. And before that—but why drag out the skeletons of an unsavory past?

Shooting through the sky toward Jupiter, I spent a fair share of the time at the controls. The pilot was a decent cuss and he gave me free lessons in navigating just to break the monotony. I learned fast.

In fact, by the time we had made our last stop-off—Mars—to pick up the sixth and last of the Boosters, the pilot had let me set 'er down by myself.

From then on it was non-stop to our destination.

The Six Boosters kept up a hearty uproar all the way. They would sing songs, shout, and tell funny stories, and drink Venus liquor. They'd slap each other on the back and bluster about how they would take Jupiter by storm.

Their pandemonium would rattle against the control-room door, with me trying to snooze on the quiet side of it.

The pilot would say to me, "You'll have a job on your hands, Mr. Eee, leading a bunch like that around a strange city. Ever been to Jupiter before?"

"As an STS guide, I'm *supposed* to have been everywhere — everywhere that the interplanetary language is spoken."

"But *have* you?"

"I'm not saying." Then I showed the pilot my little book with the confidential information for STS guides, and pointed to the motto, *When in doubt, bluff.*

The pilot gave me an understanding wink. He said that the planet of Jupiter was so far out it wasn't well known. He'd been there himself. But he'd heard it had a good space port at the Capital City, and that it fairly reeked with civilization.

And he'd heard that the Jupiterians had put some of their moons to special uses. One moon was a prison, another was a colony for the insane, and so on.

"The Boosters aren't interested in moons," I said. "They're interested in Jupiter."

WELL, twenty or thirty interplanetary hours before we were due to arrive, the six Space-Wide Boosters raised so much merry old Hell over a case of Venus liquor that they passed out, all six of them. No—seven, for the pilot was in on it too, thanks to me. I mean to say that I had insisted on staying at the controls.

"Too much back-slapping for me," I had complained. "You go ahead, Pilot. Lend your lusty voice to their good-will anthems. Lend your throat to their Venus fire-water. And your back—well, I'll rub arnica on it when the party's over."

And so the pilot had joined the party in the salon and had been the first man to pass out. And before he or any of the six Boosters came to, I landed the ship.

"Jupiter, Mr. Eee," I said to myself and gave myself a mysterious wink in the dim reflection of the porthole. It was a wink that nobody but me would understand. I glanced with satisfaction at the reflection of the gold STS on my uniform collar. This guide for the Solar Travel Service was about to go into action. Bluff was the watchword.

The landscape outside the portholes

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was spiked with towering heaps of stone, blue and green and purple, a weird mixture of Jupiterian buildings and bad lands. I had landed in a narrow clearing beside this unique city.

"Behold, the Capital City of Jupiter!" I yelled at the Pilot. He answered with a deep snore.

I passed through the control-room door into the salon. "Gentlemen, the Capital City of Jupiter!"

I kicked or prodded each of the six Boosters in turn. And what did I get for my trouble?

Boss Venoko, the leather-lunged political boss of Venus Subcity, growled without opening his eyes, "Come back later-r. Gotta big deal on. Gotta see a gangster about a bump-off."

The second man from Venus, Professor Kolo, the famous Have-and-Go Philosopher, remained dead to the world.

The two Earth men, Publicity Smith and Sam, the Jamband King, yelped or grunted but refused to stir.

The renowned Field Marshal of Mercury raised his battle-scarred head, opened one eye, and roared a valiant "Carree-e-e on!" then dropped his head between his knees and fell back to sleep.

The sixth and final Booster, the celebrated Martian Trillionaire, batted his bleary eyes and gasped, "Whazzat? Whazzat?"

"The Capital City of Jupiter," I repeated. "We're here."

" 'Sno money outa my pocket," his metallic voice clinked, and he waved me away.

While the six Boosters and the pilot slept it off, I went out alone and climbed a high rock that looked down on the circular city street. From there I had no trouble finding my way around.

When I returned to the ship, the six Big Shots were raring to march forth and give the Capital City of Jupiter the glad hand.

"This way, gentlemen," I said. The six Boosters followed me through the ship's locks. The pilot, still hazy as to where we were, remained in the control room to mumble over his instruments. He would hold down the ship till the party returned.

"BEFORE you rises the skyline of the Capital City of Jupiter," I began as we walked into the kaleidoscope of rock spires and morning shadows. "Note the similarity between the architecture and the natural scenery—"

"When do we meet one of the Big Shots?" the Martian Trillionaire broke in.

"Patience," I retorted. But my party began to complain. Weren't there any taxis or buses in this capital city? Or pedestrians? Where were the shoppers, the traffic cops, the newsboys? Why did all the people—and there were pitifully few of them—shrink back into hiding at the sight of us?

"Because common people aren't to be seen on this street," I answered boldly. "This is the famous Circle Street. Fame and Fortune reside on this thoroughfare. I warn you, the men we meet will be men of great achievement."

Boss Venoko bristled. "But not as important as us."

"In their own way—more so," I said, and all six Boosters stopped in their tracks and glared at me. I added, "Don't forget, Jupiter's a big planet compared to the Earth, Mercury, Venus and Mars."

"They could at least give us a ticker-tape reception," the Field Marshal of Mercury grumbled. "Why, when I wound up that last campaign in Mercury—"

"Silence, gentlemen," I said. "We're about to make our first call. This is the

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throne of the city greeter."

I pointed to the top of an eighty foot spire of rock.

The carved steps were almost ladder steep. The seven of us ascended. A platform surrounded the rocky throne. There sat a ragged little brown old man. He looked at me and twisted his leathery face into a frown.

"These men have come to greet you," I said. One after another we shook hands. Professor Kolo mentioned that it was a fine day.

"Not *day*," the little old man said in crisp interplanetary. "The word is dayee. Ah, how many times I have had to correct the Jupiterian monarch on that word. The monarch always relied on me. He gave me this token—"

Here the little brown man lifted a chunk of marble and looked at it admiringly.

"It's not an ordinary stone." His fingers elevated the stone with a flourish. Then his voice fell to a weird whisper. "The monarch used it to win an election. Two of the judges were in doubt, *but the monarch took this stone—*"

The whisper became an evil hiss, the stone hovered menacingly. "We must hurry on," I said. We climbed down to the street.

SOON we turned off the thoroughfare and into one of the stone houses. As our eyes adjusted to the semi-darkness I heard the Field Marshal of Mercury gasp, "Medals!"

The walls of the room were covered with them. For a few minutes we marvelled at them. Publicity Smith copied some of their inscriptions.

Brisk footsteps sounded from the next room and came to a halt with a snappy heel-click. White lights flashed on. We crowded to the door and looked in upon the most dazzling one-man army you ever saw. That uniformed soldier could have been a parade all by himself, he wore so much glitter.

The soldier's back was toward us. He was pointing to various dots on the wall map with a long sharp-pointed sword.

"May we come in?" I asked.

"Advance," the soldier snapped without turning around.

We circulated uneasily. The walls of this room were cluttered with odd weapons—some of them silvered wooden models, as Publicity Smith noted with a befuddled snort.

But it was the soldier himself, not his accoutrements, that magnetized my party of sightseers. Our Field Marshal from Mercury studied him with a hot, jealous eye. Sam, the Jamband King, edged up to the Field Marshal, nudged him, whispered, "When'll you rate a uniform like that, Marshal?"

Our Field Marshal was too scorched in the face to answer. He strode up to the wall map. "Ahem."

The uniformed soldier whirled. He jammed the sword in his scabbard and gave seven swift salutes, one to each of us.

The Boosters answered him with gulps and timid silence—all except our Field Marshal. He stepped up boldly.

"I happen to be the Field Marshal of Mercury." He opened the flap of his Booster Club coat to reveal a service bar in six shades of gold.

The soldier opened his medal-weighted military coat. His shirt was solid with service bars all the way around. "They call me the General of Jupiter."

"So you're a general," said Mercury, slipping a scornful wink to the rest of us. "Seen any action?"

"Is there any action I haven't seen?" Jupiter retorted. "I've won battles in every planet."

Mercury snorted. "You're taking in lots of territory."

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"I have ways of getting around," said Jupiter.

The Marshal of Mercury laughed. The other's cold eye made him swallow in the middle of his laugh, but he went on with a stout swagger. "Now *me*, I'm the hero that *won* the war for Mercury. The biggest and bloodiest war in history. That's a sizeable job for one man."

"It depends upon the man," said the Jupiter General.

Mercury went white with anger. "No doubt you've seen a skirmish or two on Jupiter—"

"Eye that map, my haughty friend," said Jupiter. "Wherever you see a colored pin is where I've won a battle. The red pins mean I won practically single-handed."

THE map was practically solid pins. The Jupiter General insisted on telling us about it. He gestured with his sword to make the spellbinder realistic.

The Boosters listened, wide-eyed, and Publicity Smith jotted notes on the gory details.

But our perspiring Field Marshal from Mercury couldn't take it. He spoke up to dispute dates. And when Jupiter demanded to know if he was being called a liar, Mercury fairly turned purple.

"If all you said was true twice over," the Marshal of Mercury spat, "you're still nothing to me because you never fought in the bloody Mercury war."

"I *won* that war," said Jupiter calmly.

"*You* won it! Why you damned liar. I ran that war myself—"

"Oh." Jupiter gave a sullen smirk. "So you're trying to seal my glory. I can show you, blow by blow, how *I*—" Jupiter broke off with a sly smile. "Would you like to see my special map in the next room?"

Jupiter clanked through a curtained door and Mercury stalked after him. I glanced in—in time to see the Field Marshal of Mercury bend down close over a table. The light was dim.

At the same instant, the General's long sword flashed up. It struck down with a heavy clack. The Mercury Marshal's head fell in a wastebasket.

I ducked out and called the rest of the party.

"Come gentlemen. We'll leave our warriors to chatter over their maps and battles. We'll pass on to the next point of interest."

I herded them out to the street.

Now my party of five looked curiously from house to stone pillar to street monument, wondering where we would stop next. Occasionally they glanced toward the sky, which was gradually growing heavier with the vast red rim which I had called Jupiter's largest moon.

Occasionally they looked back to see if the Field Marshal was coming, but he didn't come. And he wouldn't. And though it may sound mysterious, somehow the tightness in the muscles of my back grew easier.

"This way, please." I lead them into a cavernous blue rock that was honeycombed with passages. Soft light filtered through. The place was inhabited by some simple soul, judging by the rustic furniture. Not until we emerged on the top level did we find the dweller.

"Is he a Big Shot?" the Trillionaire whispered skeptically.

"He's a sage," I replied.

THE subject of our observations was lying on his stomach in the shade of a yellow umbrella, too comfortable to look up. He was apparently studying the grains of rice in his hand.

"I don't think he's in the mood for conversation," I suggested.

To which the sage muttered, turning

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his eyes on us in the most casual manner. "Why should I be? There's nothing new to say. Everything's been said."

His dry manner gave the impression of vast wisdom. But his eyes were not the slow lazy eyes that one would expect from his manner. They were cold and hard and the sight of them made Smith start.

However, Professor Kolo, always aggressive when he thought conversation was needed, stepped closer to the robed figure and tried to break the ice.

"It's fine weather you have here, my friend."

The sage made no answer. He drew the old frayed woolen robe he was wearing closer around his ears, as if to shut out our talk.

Professor Kolo went on heartily. "We're the Booster Club on a good-will tour. We came to get acquainted. I'm from Venus. It's another planet—like Jupiter—only smaller—and much nearer the sun—"

The robed figure turned, and now the glittering eyes combed us. "I am a sage," he said. "You can't tell me anything I don't already know. I've got all of the world's knowledge written on these little grains of rice. Why should I let you bore me, telling me Venus is another planet?"

At the mention of the rice, Smith came closer with his pencil and notebook. Then he bent down and looked into the sage's hand. The rest of us bent over his shoulders.

"You have something written—on the rice?" Smith blinked bewilderedly.

"All knowledge," said the sage, turning the rice grains about in the palm of his hand.

"But how is that possible?" Smith asked.

"I write very small," said the sage.

"No instrument in the world could write that small," Smith protested, straining his eyes to study the grains.

"Look," said the sage. He brought a small bottle of colorless liquid from his pocket. When he lifted the cork, we could see a tiny hair-like needle attached to it.

Smith squinted. "But that's too fine to make any impression."

"You think so?" The sage gave a quick jab at the publicity man's forearm. Smith jerked his arm back, wincing, all of which disturbed Professor Kolo. The professor complained that he didn't get the point. "Come closer and you'll get it," said the sage. But by this time our party preferred to move the other way. We left the sage recounting his grains of rice.

All the way down Circle Street, Smith kept rubbing his arm, muttering that he believed he'd been poisoned.

"Poisoned with knowledge, huh?" Kolo added a back slap, but his quip left the party cold.

IT was the Trillionaire who called us to a halt in front of a sign:

THE WORLD'S GREATEST PHILANTHROPIST LIVES HERE.

"I don't like that," said the Trillionaire. "It's gross misrepresentation. The man can't be as rich as all that."

So the Boosters trooped into the cave to check up.

The cave narrowed to a long winding tunnel that echoed our voices. By the time we came into the light of the amber torches no one was talking but the Martian Trillionaire. His voice clinked on, only now it seemed to clank like brass counterfeits. And then we knew we were hearing more than his voice. There was a clanking of coins, somewhere ahead.

Where the room opened out into an oval, a weirdly round figure was dancing. Under the circle of amber torches, dressed in clanking yellow discs—thou-

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sands of them—the figure was whirling and swaying in a one-man riot of gayety. But he was not only dancing. He was juggling coins, flinging them against walls.

He saw us, his spherical body jerked to an oscillating stop, and he swung his hand up to catch the last of a flock of coins out of the air.

"What do you want?" he bellowed. His face bulged at us.

"We're a good-will tour," someone said. "We've come to—"

"So you've come to ask for contributions?" the gold man cut in. "Just because I'm the richest man in the world, you come to see me! You think I'll invest. You've got schemes—I know your kind. Get out!"

The Martian Trillionaire motioned us back; he'd take care of this affair himself. He approached the roundish, gold-armored juggler. "Your preposterous sign outside the cave—"

The Martian Trillionaire forgot whatever it was he was about to say. He stopped, fascinated by the stacks of glowing coins against the wall. The glitter in his eye was both envious and hungry.

"The sign," said the gold man, "states a simple fact. I'm the world's greatest philanthropist."

Smith forgot his swelling arm long enough to take down a few statistics. The gold man reeled off the plans for his gifts in terms of decillions. He hadn't actually made the gifts yet, he admitted, because he'd been too busy making the money. Yes, he coined his own. All he had he owed to his own industry. And no good-will tourists were going to gouge him—

At this point the Martian Trillionaire shook out of the spell that the sight of heaps of money had cast over him, and gave argument.

"Did you say decillions? Tsk, tsk. There's not that much money in all the interplanetary exchanges."

"Industry and thrift," the gold man repeated, and his eyes bugged defensively. "I make my own."

"Your figures are too high," the Martian Trillionaire said crustily. "I know. My friends and I have got a corner on the world's gold supply."

"You've got no corner on mine."

The Martian Trillionaire reached to touch the gold man's clanking sleeve. "That's not gold."

"Maybe you'd like to see a stack of the real thing." The gold man's words caused the Trillionaire's breathing to quicken and his fingers to rub together eagerly. "Maybe you'd like to count it."

"That's the only way I'd believe it," said the Trillionaire as he followed the gold man across to a little alcove lighted by a single amber torch.

"Right in here," said the gold man. "Take your time. I'm always glad to have skeptical people count my gold."

HIS clanking arm touched a lever and coins began to splash down over the Martian Trillionaire's hands, from the alcove ceiling.

For a while we watched and waited. But Boss Venoko and the others were impatient to get on, and Smith was suffering for a drink of water. And the coins kept spilling down. With lustful eagerness, the Martian Trillionaire slid them through his hands furiously, computing them in rough thousands. They heaped up around his knees.

The rest of the party left him to his counting and went on.

The five of us stopped on Circle Street for a drink. There was an argument over whether we should wait for the missing members of the party or proceed. Meanwhile I hiked back into the gold man's cave to see how the Martian Trillionaire was faring.

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He was still counting. The little alcove was filling up with gold and he was in the middle of it. It was up to his chest. He was trying to wriggle out, he was shouting that it was only fool's gold, he was struggling—

But the roundish gold man was paying no attention. He was juggling again, and his roly-poly body was dancing gleefully—like his eyes.

The gold hailed down on the Trillionaire's head. He was being buried alive. He shrieked—and I returned to the party of four. "We won't wait any longer."

We passed a house of green stone whose cornices were lighted by a string of green lights. One of the lights had blinked off sometime in the past. I walked over to it, adjusted it, and it blazed on. Professor Kolo complimented me for doing my good turn. He also suggested that we go in and see who lived there.

But I rejected the suggestion confidently. There would be no one at home, I reasoned. On a planet like this where there were so many big moons to black out the sunlight, the people were wise to leave their outdoor lights burning so they could find their way home.

This line of reasoning brought on another disturbing discussion: Why should any moon be so big? The vast reddish disc which I had predicted would soon block out our sunlight was bidding fair to keep my promise. The more skyscape it filled, the more my party became throubled over a theoretical problem in proportions. As Smith put it, how much bigger must this planet of Jupiter look if we were viewing it from a moon instead of standing on it.

A musical tone welled up to us, seemingly out of the ground.

Sam, the Jamband King, said, "Hsssh!" and everyone listened.

We edged along Circle Street and the sound grew louder. A series of variations in pitch made Sam snap his fingers. "What a melody! What a melody! But it's all a machine. No human could get such an even tone—"

We looked down into a rock-walled pit and saw where the music was coming from. The musician looked up through his ventilated glass roof and saw us descending the spiral stairs. He went on playing, looking up at us with soulful eyes.

RATHER than break in upon an artist's music, I stopped my party of sightseers half way down the spiral. I whispered to them of perfection. This was it—the perfect and unadulterated tones of a flute, made possible by a lifetime devoted to ceaseless practice, practice, practice.

"Enough," I said. "We must hurry on."

But only three men ascended the stairs with me. The Jamband King went on down. He had evidently noticed that there were other musical instruments lying around near the musician.

By the time we reached the top of the stairs the music had turned into a duet. Along with the flute melody came a shrill c larinet obligato. And what that did to the three Boosters! They looked down over the edge of the pit and shouted "Bravo, Sam!" Go to it!"

"Plenty hot, ain't he?" Boss Venoko turned to me. "I hope their broadcastin' it all over Jupiter. Sam'll put us Boosters over, all right."

"But that flutist is sensitive," I warned. "He claims to be the purest tone-maker in the world—"

"Ha! Listen at Sam hog the breaks away from him. Look! The other guy's picking up a clarinet . . ."

"But he's not blowing it. He's attaching it to an air tube from the wall," Smith observed, "and playing it on

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artificial wind."

"Unfair advantage," Boss Venoko muttered. "Sam shoulda beat him to it."

The battle was on. That is, the two musicians were aiming their notes squarely at each other. The Boosters were so sure that Sam, the Jamband King, would be good for an all day and night marathon on these terms that they went on their way.

I lingered only long enough to see the clash pass the turning point. From the faint odor that wafted up through the glass air shafts I knew that it was not compressed air which fed through the tube to the Jupiter musician's clarinet. It was gas. A high wailing note from Sam's instrument gradually faded away like a dying siren. The bell of the other's instrument continued to play against his face. Sam's clarinet choked off.

I caught up with the remaining three: Smith, Boss Venoko, Professor Kolo.

"Now I don't hear anything but that flute tone again," the professor was saying. "Maybe Sam will catch up with us."

"We won't wait," I said.

"Where we going?" Smith asked.

"We'll see if anyone's at home here," I said, leading the way to a stone house clinging perilously to a mountainside. The approach was a maze of zigzagging stairs, with a footbridge here and there to cross a tumbling mountain stream. Smith never failed to stop and bathe his arm and catch a drink at each crossing.

INSIDE the house we could hear the grinding of water-power machinery somewhere among the cavernous chambers. We searched around until we came upon the one occupant of the house.

We found him in the jagged walled library with his feet propped up on the window ledge. He held an enormous red book before him, leaning it against the edge of the stone table.

"Hello," said Professor Kolo. "May we come in?"

A long drawn "S-s-s-sh!" was the man's strange answer. At the same time he removed a set of long fluffy false whiskers from his face, and replaced them with a black bristly set. He turned a page and went on reading the book.

That is, he appeared to read it. But as we drew closer we saw that the page he was studying was perfectly blank.

"We're members of the Space-Wide Booster Club," said Professor Kolo.

"I'm Zaxo," said the man in a low voice. "S-s-sh!" He narrowed his eyes at us and gave his chin a high thrust, accentuating it by making another change in his false whiskers. Obviously, from the supply of false faces and whiskers on the table, these changes of face were a part of normal conversation with him. He repeated, "I'm Zaxo. . . . Does that mean anything to you?"

The Boosters weren't sure how to answer this. The man's face repelled them, with or without whiskers.

"There's a politician among you," Zaxo said, sniffing.

"That's me," said Boss Venoko.

"I knew it. You're a spy."

"Hell, no. I'm no spy. I'm a city boss—the main ramrod down at Venus—"

"Don't try to crawfish. You know I'm Zaxo, the revolutionist. You've come to find out how soon I'll strike—"

"Revolutionist!" Boss Venoko gasped.

"Don't try to act surprised. I'm onto you." Zaxo gave a weird laugh that tumbled ominously down the scale until it melted into the grind of machines.

Boss Venoko struggled to recover

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himself. "Hell, if you're a revolutionist, I can tell you a thing or two—"

"No ifs," Zaxo growled. "I've got it all organized. The guns and the men are on my side. All that waits is a little more propaganda—then the zero hour!"

"Wait a minute, my friend," said Venoko, rasping irritatedly. "Lemme tell you something. You don't need a revolution. You can get what you want outa the present setup if you're smart—like me. Watch your graft, watch your gangs, play your henchmen—"

"I want a revolution," Zaxo grated, "and I'll have a revolution!"

Boss Venoko gulped and shifted his eyes from Zaxo to the book.

"And don't think I'll let you in on the secrets," Zaxo continued. "You and all of Venus will be swallowed up."

"Your book seems to be blank." Boss Venoko was trying to change the subject.

"How else," said Zaxo, "would I keep its secrets from you spies?"

PROFESSOR KOLO whispered that we'd better get out of here, and Smith acted on the suggestion. I followed the two of them to the door; but Boss Venoko began to look around, and I sam him saunter into another room. Zaxo followed him. I followed Zaxo. The machine was a printing press. The automatic feeder was busy inserting papers. Papers were scattered everywhere, but none had been printed.

"I'm printing propaganda," Zaxo volunteered, gathering up a stack of papers and placing them within reach of the feeder.

"But you're not *printing* anything," Venoko protested.

"It's *secret* propaganda," said Zaxo. "No spy is going to get the goods on me."

"I tell you, I'm no spy."

"That's exactly what I would expect you to say if you *were* a spy," said Zaxo. "By saying it you've proved you are one." With these words he slipped a false face on that made him a red-faced devil with an evil grin.

"There's a screw loose somewhere," Boss Venoko muttered. "If you weren't so stupid, I could be helpful to you. I know plenty about propaganda—"

"So you want to help me?" A dangerous glitter shone in the revolutionist's eyes. "I'll let you read this message."

He picked up one of the blank papers and handed it to Venoko, who glared at it bewilderedly. Zaxo stopped the press.

"If you can't see it on the paper, you can read it in the type. Look right up there into the press. . . . Get closer. . . ."

Boss Venoko inserted his head deeper between the powerful jaws of the press.

Zaxo made a swift reach for the lever, to throw the press in gear. He yanked it. The jaws closed down . . .

I hurried out to find Smith and Professor Kolo.

A certain tight and knotted feeling in the muscles of my back, which I have previously referred to, was now more relaxed than at any time since this tour began. But the hearty backslap with which the professor now greeted me brought back a sharp twinge.

A little farther around Circle Street the professor and I left Smith drinking at a public fountain while we went on to make another acquaintance. Our way led up a long inclined path flanked on either side by columns of green and purple stone. Jeweled designs glittered from the throne at the top of this ascent.

"This must be a person of tremendous importance," said the professor, proud that he had this event all to himself. He swelled his chest. "I've yet to meet a really important person who isn't impressed by my Have-and-Go philosophy."

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"Don't forget," I warned, "that persons in the Capital City of Jupiter have their own standards of greatness." Then looking at the motionless figure who sat on the throne, I added in a whisper, "And don't be too sure this is a *person*."

THE figure on the throne was a gentle-faced old man with an unkept beard and long fingernails and a pair of glassy eyes that were fixed on some imaginary point up in the clouds. It was the messianic fervor of those eyes that made Professor Kolo gape.

"Is he alive?" the professor whispered to me. We noticed that the fringe of the old man's robe had been gnawed away, by mice, perhaps. Occasionally birds would alight on his shoulders. But his contemplative eyes were not swerved by such trifles.

Now the old man looked down at us and motioned us to come.

Professor Kolo marched up, looking his brightest and best, introduced himself, and inquired the old man's name and business.

The old man answered in a low rumble like far-away thunder.

"I am God."

A curve of cynicism passed the lips of the Have-and-Go philosopher. "Just a minute, my friend. I've traveled several planets and studied several religious legends. But all these gods are purely mythical—"

"I am *the* God of the Universe," said the old man.

Kolo gave an uncomfortable laugh.

The old man's eyes showed a glint of fierceness. "I cannot tolerate skeptics, much less cynics."

"I'm sorry, old man, but you're completely obsolete. I mean—no offense, you understand—but you should read my books. I've explained you away completely."

The fierce glint in the old man's eyes became a blaze. His gaunt fingers reached for a piece of old rusty chain that lay near the arm of his throne.

Professor Kolo shrank back. The chain swung at him, but the professor dodged behind a column, leaped into the clear, and was off. He raced back down the long incline, hurling rocks and shadows.

I overtook him and Smith near the last curve of Circle Street.

Smith said his arm was better, and he gave me a healthy slap on the back to prove it. He hoped the rest of the party would catch up before the sky was completely blacked out. The lowering sun was already eclipsed, but the heavenful of red moon cast a warm glow over the jagged purple city.

"There's the first vehicle I've seen," said Smith, pointing across the street. We struck out to overtake the wheeled object. Professor Kolo, who had had some of his conversational proclivities knocked out of him by his recent interview with "God," lagged after us with a cautious step.

THE vehicle proved to be a combination tricycle-and-cart affair with certain peculiarities that made Smith mutter in dead languages. The rider of the tricycle was a one-eyed man with one arm tied to his back. The front wheel of his tricycle was five-sided instead of round, so that he rode with a rhythmic gallop.

The cart in tow was full of rocks. It rolled along on five wheels.

"What's up, my friend?" I said. The tricycle rider ignored me. He looked from Smith to Kolo and back to Smith.

"What's that?" he barked, pointing at Smith's notebook.

Smith told him. "I'm taking down all curious sights. That five-wheeled cart, for instance—"

"Don't be fooled by that," said the

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tricycle rider. "That's only a device to confuse my imitators."

"What imitators?" Smith asked, writing notes furiously.

"Inventors all over the universe," and the man motioned Smith closer and talked with him in a confidential tone. He was the greatest inventor in the Solar world, he explained. He could out-invent anyone, even with one hand tied behind him. His sharp face took on the glow of genius as he talked. "All the best inventions of the modern age have stemmed from this brain."

He tapped his head modestly and smiled. Then a vengeful light came in his single eye. He related that he was the victim of thousands—yes, millions—of thefts. Every inventor in the world stole ideas from him. "Every planet is guilty. Your Earth inventors are shams. Where did they get their television, their space ships, their interplanetary telephones? *Out of my mind!*"

"How?" Smith asked. "Do they come here and read your blueprints?"

"Nothing so simple," the inventor sneered. "My inventive mind is so potent its emanations fill all space. I can't hold the power back—*What are you looking at?*"

Smith had sauntered to the edge of a nearby patch of blackness — close enough to see that it was a deep black pit.

"I was just making a few notes," said Smith.

"What for?" came the suspicious bark.

"A report for the Boosters' Club annual."

"So you're stealing my secrets too!" the inventor hissed. "You've discovered my magic well—the one secret I had left. Now you know. You've seen the magic liquid."

"Magic?" Smith glanced down at the black slimy water a hundred feet down. "What does it do?"

"That," the inventor smiled, "we shall see—as soon as the liquid is within reach. I'm filling the hole up with rocks—with bones—with anything. It was nice of you to come along. I can use you."

The tricycle lurched forward, the inventor's arm struck out. Smith, notebook, and pencil went flying over the edge to plummet down into blackness.

I JOGGED back to Professor Kolo, who had sauntered on a few minutes before. "Where's Smith?" he asked. "What was that deep splash I heard?"

"Splash?" I grunted. "Gushy conversation, no doubt. Smith and the inventor are getting on famously."

The professor mumbled uncomfortably. He was a bit worried over the way everyone had dropped out. Everything had been so strange—every Big Shot had been so bitterly suspicious.

"Ah, *there's* something familiar, anyway," he said, brightening. We had come back to our starting point on Circle Street and only a few yards beyond was the conspicuous eighty-foot spire where we had first shaken hands with the city greeter.

In the dim light we saw the little ragged brown old man, now loitering at the base of his throne. The sight of him uncorked the professor's conversational enthusiasm. Here was a chance, Kolo must have said to himself, to restore his morale from the beating it had taken at the hands of the "God of the Universe." He would walk over and have another chat with the city greeter.

At our approach the little old brown man made tracks up the ladder-like ascent. He had picked up two bricks from the ground, and these objects he lugged all the way up with him.

By the time we made the climb to

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the summit of his stone spire he was seated securely in his throne, weighing a brick in each hand.

"Hello, friend," said Professor Kolo with a broad smile. "Since we saw you last we've had quite an eventful day*ee*."

He was careful to draw out that last word with the precise pronunciation that the greeter had used before.

"Not day*ee*," the ragged little man corrected with great dignity. "The pronunciation is day*ah*. How many times I've had to correct the monarch on that word. The monarch always relied on me. He gave me these tokens—"

With these words the ragged little man lifted the two bricks high over his head, looking up at them with pride.

"But that isn't the way you told it before!" the professor yelped excitedly. "It was a chunk of marble—and the pronunciation was—"

At this point I found myself scrambling down the stone peak as fast as I could go. But before I could get out of earshot the sudden flare-up took its inevitable turn, and the result was instantaneous treachery.

Professor Kolo beat me down. He whizzed past me so close he almost knocked me off. I heard him land—*flump!*

I HUGGED the handholds until the barrage of bricks and stone had shot down on him. Even in that sickening moment I felt the tension though my shoulder muscles completely vanish. I slipped nimbly down the last of the eighty-foot descent, clambered over the professor's dead form, and went on my way.

By the time I reached the space ship a message had taken form in my mind. I would have the pilot send it at his earliest opportunity.

Lights were aglow in the fore end of the ship. By this time a red semi-darkness had enevloped the whole landscape—reflected light from the vast heavenly body that hovered across the center of the deep blue.

I entered by the salon locks. I pencilled a message, "Relay information to STS that all members of the Boosters party have been taken care of.—Mister Eee." I hung it on the spindle.

But just as I was starting into the control room to announce my return to the pilot, I heard his voice. Someone else was in there talking with him.

Who could it be? Someone from this jagged city? Or someone from the outside world?

Through the porthole in the farther wall I saw the dim outlines of a flivver ship anchored eighty or a hundred yards away. So the pilot's visitor, whoever he was, had just pulled in from the outside world and had come over to this ship for a talk.

And yet he was speaking authoritatively on these space regions—and in a voice with a certain unforgetable quality—

I crept to the partition, peered through a crack at the base of the service window. The visitor was a husky white-coated fellow with bristling black eyebrows.

"Your instruments haven't lied," the white-coat was saying. "You're *not* on Jupiter. You're on one of its moons."

"I knew it," the pilot snapped decisively. "That checks with the figures I've been laboring over all day. I was asleep when we landed—"

"Rather a bad break, landing here," said the white-coat. "This is the asylum moon where we've isolated the insane. What's worse, you've bumped into the most dangerous spot on the whole satellite: the settlement of our worst paranoiacs."

"Paranoiacs?"

"They're a treacherous lot," said the

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white-coat, "unless you know exactly how to handle them . . ."

WITH every word I overheard I shrank backward, toward the salon locks.

"They're the most highly self-inflated, most terribly persecuted creatures in the world," said the white-coat. "That is, they *think* they're persecuted. That's why they're dynamite. Woe unto anyone who crosses their path, or laughs at them, or meddles with their private worlds. You see, each paranoid lives within his own highly organized delusions. In his own mind he is a great conqueror—or a millionaire—or a messiah—"

"You say they're dangerous?" the pilot's voice was a choked gulp.

"They'll murder without warning. Outsiders will blunder innocently into their dream worlds—and suddenly, rather than let their dream worlds be smashed, the paranoiacs will smash the intruders. Zip!—they'll let go with an ax murder—or something fancier along the same lines—"

"My God!" The pilot's fearful gasp made the door between us shudder. "What will happen to—"

"Whats the matter, man?"

"There's been a hellova mistake!" the pilot cried. He flung the control room door open just as I was starting out through the salon locks. I froze.

"Oh, there you are—thank goodness," the pilot looked relieved.

"Just coming in," I replied blithely, sauntering over to him. His white-coated visitor stood in the control-room doorway gazing at me steadily. I ignored him, directed my words to the pilot. "I've left the Boosters back in the Capital City—"

"This *isn't* the Capital City!" the pilot exploded. "It isn't even Jupiter—"

"Mister Eee!" The visitor's dark eyebrows shot up in surprised recognition. "What are *you* doing in this ship?"

"I'm a guide for STS, sir," I said. "I tour the world's Big Shots around to see the sights."

"Oh?" The white-coat gave a slight nudge and a meaningful eye to the pilot, who was too bewildered by this meeting to know what it was all about. Then the visitor came down to me with a friendly outstretched hand. "You remember me, Mr. Eee. I'm one of the doctors from Jupiter. I'm your friend. I've been looking for you all over the Solar system."

"For *me?*" I said.

"So you've come back," said the white-coat, smiling gently. "That's a good fellow. You haven't been into any mischief, I hope? Come along, now."

The pilot followed us through the locks. The white-coat motioned me to walk ahead, and he turned back to have a word with the pilot at the side of the ship.

"Speaking of curious cases, this Mr. Eee has a very complex record, but his most persistent delusion is that someone is going to stab him in the back."

In the dim light I could see the pilot's eyes bug wide. "You mean *he*—"

The white-coat whispered something I couldn't hear. He added, "Then again he may not . . . So far as the local staff knows, he's never been guilty of any violence—not since he's been confined here."

The white-coat led me back to Circle Street.

Sometime after big red Jupiter had slipped down under the horizon, the pilot and his ship charged off into space. The echoes of the rocket motors thundered among the buildings and peaks of purple stone.

The white-coated doctor's ship would leave later. He and the local staff were

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quite busy, for the present, making their extended rounds of Circle Street.

Which meant that I would soon have callers. So I strolled around the premises of my house and made sure that everything was shipshape for company. Yes, the string of green lights that hung along the cornices of my house were all burning.

THE END

The Editor's Notebook

A CONFIDENTIAL CHAT WITH THE EDITOR

(Concluded from page 8)

with his very popular story of some months ago in our companion magazine, *Amazing Stories*, "Enchantress of Lemuria."

NEXT month, Robert Moore Williams will present a story that had a very odd beginning. Your editor dropped down to St. Louis to visit him and his lovely wife, and while talking over various things, he showed us a clipping taken from Time Magazine, an insurance ad, in which a house had caught fire mysteriously in dozens of impossible places, such as the interior of a book, the leg of a table, a wet timber.

"There's a story there somewhere," said Bob, "but I'll be hanged if I can see it."

Well, to hog all the credit, your editor had a flash of pain somewhere in his cranium, and out popped an idea. That idea you will read, in its complete story form in "The House Of Fire" in the January FANTASTIC ADVENTURES. Bob has given this one some really fine treatment, and you'll enjoy it to the last period.

THE V for victory campaign now going on inspired Duncan Farnsworth to the extent of writing a story called "V For Vengeance" and you'll find it in the next issue, too. It's just a short, less than 4,000 words, but you'll be delighted with it.

WHO was Carson Carruthers? William P. McGivern asked himself that question when he wrote the yarn that is his offering to the January issue. Well, when McGivern got around to answering it, Carson Carruthers turned out to be Carson Carruthers, strangely enough, but the "who" was tacked onto another person—the person with whom Carson signed a contract. It's a chilling little yarn, not original by any means, but treated in a fashion only possible to an Irishman!

HOWEVER, the treat of the issue for you time-travel fans will be "The Man Who Changed History" by that ever-growing favorite, John York Cabot, who deserts his special field, the short story, and pops out with a novelette that will pin your ears back for sheer interest and originality. Boy, do things happen in this yarn! Whatever you do, don't miss the fantastic adventures of aristocratic Reggie Vanderveer!

BUT enough of next issue. Let's take one peek into the more distant future. Remember Ralph Milne Farley's "City Of Lost Souls" penned in collaboration with Al P. Nelson? Well, that brilliant duo have finally written the sequel you all asked for. It's called "Paradise Regained," and it's novel-length. We'll give it to you as soon as humanly possible, because it's good!

NOW, let's spill a few fantastic facts about our authors. Jack West shot an 88 on the golf course the other day. He plays like he writes—but he doesn't use the same words! Oh, Jack, shame on you! That little ball can't hear you! Or can it?

Magarian shoots a mean game of dice, but he always loses.

David Wright O'Brien, who bowls along with William P. McGivern and A. R. Steber in the Ziff-Davis Bowling League, managed to kegel a neat 94 the other night. He has to say: ". . ."

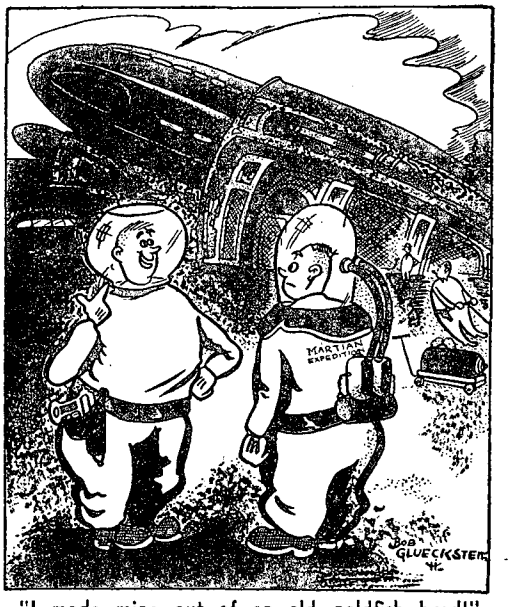
Robert Moore Williams can beat any damn tennis-playing author in the country! And we'd like to say we believe him. We really do!

Henry Gade holds a 187 average in his league bowling this year. Neat stuff, Hank!

Your editor? Well, his tiddly-winks play is impeccable. Indeed, sensational!

Which is enough for this time.

Rap



"I made mine out of an old goldfish bowl!"

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Chicago Louie screamed hoarsely and leaped into the air in agony

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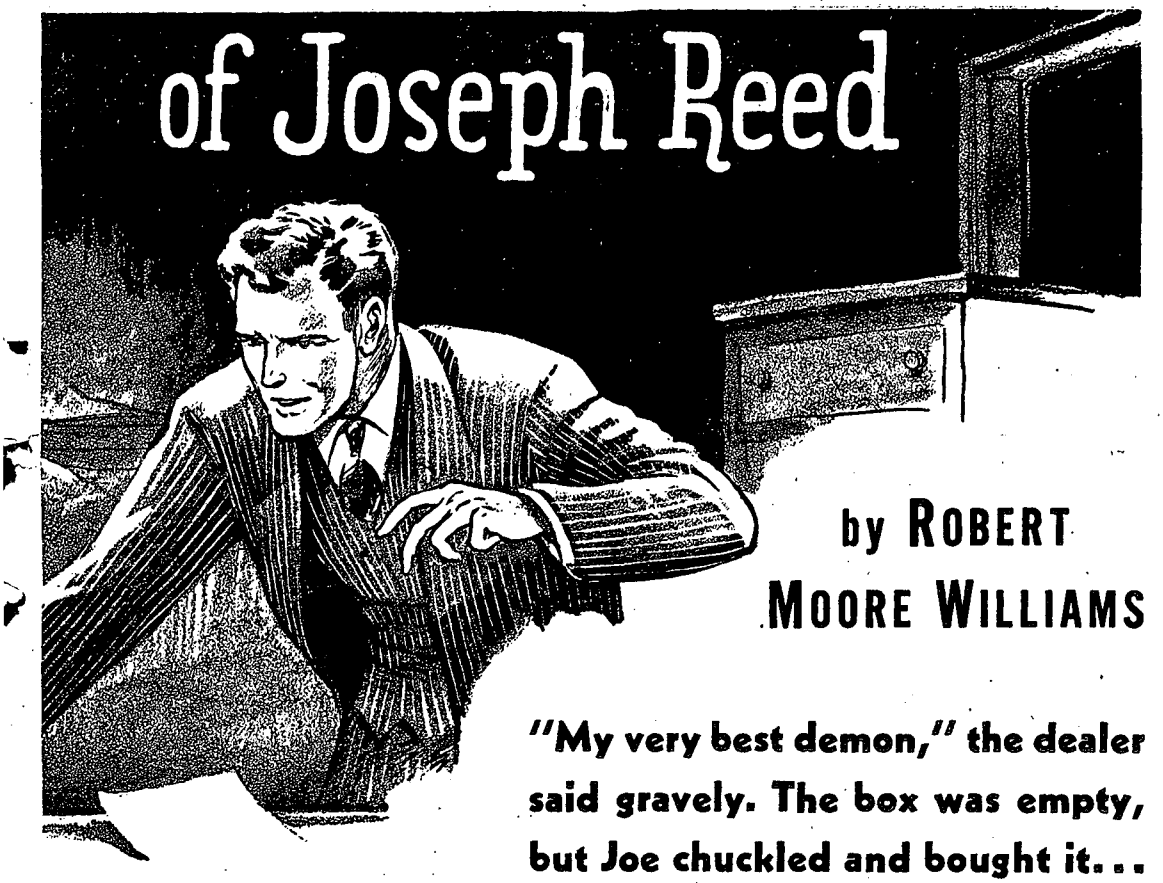
# of Joseph Reed



by ROBERT MOORE WILLIAMS

"My very best demon," the dealer said gravely. The box was empty, but Joe chuckled and bought it...

"WILL you marry me, Janie?" Joe Reed said. There was no quaver in his voice, no hesitation in his manner. He was the favored suitor calmly asking for the hand of the girl in marriage, certain that he will be accepted.

"Oh, Joe!" Janie Rice said. She was a red-head, with curves where a girl ought to have them. There were stars in her eyes when she looked at Joe. She moved toward him. "Of course I'll marry you, Joe. Why did you wait so long to ask me?"

This is heaven, he thought, taking her into his arms. "Oh, Joe—" she whispered. He kissed her.

JOE REED strode straight from the cubbyhole where he pounded out stories for the Star into the city room. This was the lair of City Editor Trigger, that bad, bad man. Telephones were ringing in this room, typewriters were rattling. Joe Reed strode straight to the desk of the city editor.

"Trigger," he said. "I'm getting married. I want a raise."

Trigger was reading copy and swearing to himself as his blue pencil chopped out whole paragraphs of the work of some unfortunate reporter. To say that he was in a bad humor would be beside the point. He was *always* in a bad humor. The green eye shade that he wore gave his face a greenish cast, but the slaves of the city room were convinced that the color of Trigger's

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face resulted not from the eye shade but from the fact that he was blood brother of the devil. He looked up at Joe Reed.

"What?" he said.

"I'm getting married," Joe Reed said. "It's all nonsense that two can live as cheaply as one. Therefore I want a raise."

Trigger smiled. 'Of course, Joe," he said kindly. "You did an excellent job on that Chicago Louie expose. That alone entitles you to a raise. And since you are getting married, Joe, you will need more money. Will seventy-five dollars a week be satisfactory, Joe?"

"Gosh, yes, Mr. Trigger!" Joe Reed gasped. He had been making forty a week and at the best was hoping for a raise to fifty. And here Trigger was giving him seventy-five! "Thanks a lot—"

"Don't mention it," Trigger said. "By the way, I want you to do another story on Chicago Louie. Find out where he's hiding—"

"Sure thing, Mr. Trigger. I'll get on it right away."

"IT'S LIKE dis," Chicago Louie said. He was a big man with a small round head set squarely on massive shoulders. His face was grim. There were two gorillas with him in this secret hideaway. "You put us on a spot with these damned stories you been writin'. You bust up de racket and we hafta go on de lam. And—" He paused, his expressionless eyes drilling into the reporter, "it's gotta stop, see? It's gotta stop."

"It will stop when one of two things happen," Joe Reed said. "I'll stop writing about you when you go straight or when you go to the penitentiary. You can take your choice, Louie. It's up to you." He shrugged.

"Supposin' I don't like either choice?" Chicago Louie said.

"Then you will have to take the consequences," Joe Reed said firmly.

"Yeah?"

"Yeah."

"Listen, you wise crackin' newsboy," Chicago Louie said. "You know what's gonna happen to you, huh? You know what's gonna happen? The boys are gonna put your feet in a wash tub full of concrete and you're gonna sit still until it gets good and hard, and then, some nice dark night, the boys are gonna drop you in de river—kerplunk!" He emphasized his meaning by making a hollow booming noise deep in his throat. It sounded like a rock dropping in a rainbarrel.

There was a fine film of sweat on Joe Reed's forehead. He let it stay there.

"You sniveling, cowardly rat," he said. "Do you realize you can't touch a reporter in this man's town? The Star will put ten thousand dollars on the head of each of you. You'll be hunted from one end of this country to the other. Open that door and let me out of here. The second you touch a hair of my head you will be signing your own death warrant."

He spoke firmly, his voice resonant. He wasn't scared of a thousand gangsters. They were all cowards at heart.

The two gorillas looked at Chicago Louie. "He's right, boss," one of them whispered.

"You remember what happened when Jake Lingle got bumped off," the other gorilla said. "If we knock this rat over, it'll get so hot that hell will be cool compared to this town.

"I tell you, boss, we can't do it."

"Don't be too hard on us, Mr. Reed," Chicago Louie began to whine. "We didn't mean nuthin'. We was only tryin' to scare you."

"It's all right, men," Joe Reed said. "You have nothing to fear from me.

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Just go straight and I'll protect you." He felt rather sorry for these gangsters. They deserved pity, not condemnation. Probably as kids they had had to play in the streets, without ever having a chance to grow up to be honest, law-abiding citizens. He would get them jobs, assist them—

"Joe Reed!" a voice said in his ear. *"Wake up."*

WITH a jerk that almost unjointed his neck, Joe Reed opened his eyes. Chicago Louie and his two gorillas faded from his vision. He wasn't in a room in the gangster's hideout. He was in his own little cubbyhole in the Star building, his feet propped up on his desk, an uncompleted story in the typewriter in front of him. He stared wildly around, trying to remember what had happened.

The girl stamped her foot again. "Joe, this is disgraceful," she said. "Don't you have any sense of responsibility at all? Suppose Mr. Trigger had found you sound asleep, instead of me. He would have discharged you. Then what would you have done?"

Joe was in a daze. But in a daze or otherwise, he recognized this girl. She had red hair and curves where a girl ought to have them.

"Janie!" Joe shouted, hastily taking his feet off the desk. He beamed at her. However this was nothing unusual. He was always beaming at this girl reporter. "Darling!" he continued. "When did you set the date?"

"What date?" Jane Rice said.

"Why the date of our marriage," he said, confusion in his voice. By now he knew he had been asleep. But he did not as yet know he had been dreaming. "I proposed to you and you accepted me," he explained. "Don't you remember? You asked me why I hadn't proposed sooner. What's the matter? What are you doing?"

Jane Rice leaned forward. Joe thought she was going to kiss him and he opened his arms.

"Take your hands off of me," she said. "I'm only sniffing your breath to see if you've been drinking again."

"Janie!" Joe gulped, releasing her. "Darling. I proposed to you. Don't you remember."

"You've proposed to me fifty times at least," she said. For a moment she stared at him, perplexity on her face. "What's the matter with you, Joe?"

"I must have been dreaming," Joe Reed said. He felt all weak inside. He had proposed to this girl and she had accepted him. He had felt like he was king of the world. There was nothing he couldn't do, no mountain too high to be climbed, no obstacle too big to surmount. He told her about the dream he had had.

Her face softened as she listened. "Oh, Joe," she said. "You're a swell guy. Honest you are. And I like you, Joe. I like you a lot." She took his coat lapels in her hands. "But, Joe, a girl just can't marry you."

"Why?"

"Because you're crazy, Joe. Because you have no sense of responsibility. Because—" She was about to cry.

"There's a man out in the reception room to see you, Mr. Reed," an office boy yelled, appearing at this moment. "He says if you don't pay him the eight bucks you still owe on that suit you bought last year, he's gonna sue."

Having delivered his message, the boy vanished as quickly as he had appeared.

"Tell him I'll pay him next week," Joe yelled after the boy. He turned back to the girl. "But, Janie, I'll turn over a new leaf. I promise I will. Cross my heart and hope to die. The minute you say the word, I'll start paying my

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bills, I'll quit drinking—"

She shook her head. "How often have you told that bill collector you will pay him next week?"

"Oh, two or three times— But Janie—"

"No, Joe," she said. "You make promises—"

"I'll keep this one," he vowed. "I really mean it."

"You always mean it, Joe. The trouble is you don't mean it long enough. I'm afraid the answer is 'No,' Joe. What I came to tell you was," she paused in the doorway, "Mr. Trigger wants to see you right away." The door closed behind her.

JOE REED sighed and sat down. That was the trouble with him, he never could remember the promises he made. Every morning when he started to work, he filled himself to the brim with good intentions—which he always forgot to carry out. In his heart of hearts, he knew that Janie was right. Girls wanted protection, they wanted security. All he could give them would be promises. No wonder Janie turned him down. He ought to be turned down. He ought to be kicked in the pants.

"Where's that story you were doing, Reed?" a voice said from the doorway.

He didn't need to look up to know who was speaking. It was Trigger.

"I'm working on it now, boss,' he said hastily.

"You're working on it, are you?" Trigger said, coming into the room. His bulk filled the cubbyhole as he leaned down and inspected the sheet of paper in the typewriter. "I see you've worked on it to the extent of writing two lines."

"I got stuck on the lead."

"Reed," said the city editor, "you're a brilliant reporter. You did a nice job on that Chicago Louie racket expose. That's why you're still on this paper, Reed. But in case you've forgotten it, we get out a daily paper around here. We meet a deadline." He looked at his watch. "We *met* a deadline ten minutes ago. This story you are working on was supposed to be finished before that deadline, Reed. What have you got to say for yourself, Reed?"

"I'll have it ready for the next edition," Joe said quickly. He didn't like Trigger's tone.

"You needn't bother," the city editor said. "I've already assigned it to another man."

"Assigned it to another— You mean I'm fired?"

"No," said Trigger. "Not yet. I'm giving you another chance, Reed. We've got a tip on where Chicago Louie is hiding out. You go interview him, Reed, and get his side of the story."

"But—Listen, boss, you know Chicago Louie has men out looking for me," Joe said wildly. For once he was telling the truth. The gangster had faithfully promised to the world that there was going to be one less nosy reporter in this town. For weeks Joe had scarcely ventured out of the city room. "I can't do that, boss. They'll kill me."

"That's what we're all hoping," said Trigger. Not for nothing had the greenish cast of his face been attributed to a close kinship to the devil. "Either come back with that story or don't come back at all. What do you say to that, Reed?"

"What do I say to it?" Joe Reed shouted, leaping to his feet. He intended to say that Trigger could go to hell, that the Star could go to hell, that the whole damned country could go to hell for all of him. Then he intended to march right out of the office. He would set an example for the slaves of this local room. He would show them

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that one man, at least, had the courage to defy Trigger. He would quit.

THE conversation, naturally, had not been conducted in whispers. Trigger had started shouting the minute he entered Joe's cubbyhole. These shouts had attracted the attention of everyone present. Joe could see reporters, rewrite men, copy boys lined up outside. They were grinning. They weren't grinning with him. They were grinning at him, because he was going to get fired.

Janie was watching too but she wasn't grinning. She looked as if she was going to cry.

If he told Trigger to go to hell, the city editor would certainly fire him. If he got fired, he could kiss Janie goodbye. She had said he was irresponsible. Quitting would only prove her point.

"Well, what do you say?" Trigger shouted.

"I say this!" Joe shouted in reply. "I'll interview Chicago Louie."

He was aware that a stunned silence followed his words. The typewriters quit rattling. Even the telephones seemed to cease ringing. For a whole minute there was silence.

Not every day in the week did this newspaper staff get a chance to hear a man announce he would commit suicide. For Joe Reed to try to interview the gangster was the equivalent of committing suicide, and the staff knew it.

He could see expressions of awe on their faces as he made his announcement.

"Joe's a brave guy," somebody said admiringly.

"He certainly is," another said. "Imagine interviewing Chicago Louie!"

"He's an old time reporter. Not scared of anything."

"He'll get the Pulitizer award for this."

Even Trigger was impressed. He stared at Joe as if he couldn't believe his eyes. "You mean that?" he said.

"Of course I mean it!" Joe said firmly. He reached across his desk, picked up his hat, stuck it jauntily on his head. With an airy wave of his hand, he marched out of the room.

"Joe!" a girl's voice called.

He looked around. Janie was hurrying down the hall after him.

"Joe, you don't mean you're going to interview that gangster, do you? Oh, Joe, he'll kill you."

"I certainly do mean it," Joe Reed answered firmly. "You said I was irresponsible. You said I made promises and didn't keep them. I'm going to show you that you're wrong."

NO soldier marching forth to battle ever felt braver than did Joe Reed at this moment. He had impressed Trigger. He had gained the respect of all the whole staff. Janie was concerned over his welfare. Everything was working perfectly.

"I'm going to interview Chicago Louie if it's the last thing I ever do," he said. "Goodbye now."

As he entered the elevator, he saw that she was still standing in the hall staring after him. There were tears in her eyes. "My hero," he thought he heard her say.

The address Trigger had given him was on the north side. The gangster was reported to be in hiding there. Joe caught a cab in front of the Star building.

"Start north, buddy," he told the driver. "Then circle the block and head south. Anywhere is all right, just so it's south."

"I gotcha, mister," the driver said.

If Chicago Louie was hiding on the north side, Joe Reed was going south. He did not and never had intended to

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interview the gangster.

As to the story, he could fake it. This would not be the first time he had written a wholly mythical account of an imaginary interview. Trigger would not know the difference. He would get a story and that was all he wanted. Janie would think him a hero and the office would regard him with awe. When Chicago Louie read the story in the paper, he would probably protest bitterly, but he was not in a position to make his protests effective. Nobody would believe him anyhow. And if he stuck his head out of hiding, the police would beat him ears down.

As a solution to his problem, this was completely satisfactory to Joe Reed.

"Where to on the south side, buddy?" the taxi-driver asked.

"Find some nice quiet saloon," Joe said. "On a nice quiet side street."

"I gotcha," the driver said. "I know just the place."

CHAPTER II

Joe Gets a Surprise

IT was a perfect place for a hideout, Joe saw as he paid his fare and dismissed the taxi. It was an old street of quiet shops and shuttered flats. Forty years ago this street had quietly gone to sleep and the city had grown up around it without it ever awakening.

"Jeeze!" said Joe, gazing at the old shops. "I never knew this place existed."

He started to enter the saloon. And stopped dead in his tracks. There was a sign in the window of the shop beside the saloon. The sign read:

DEMONS FOR SALE
Have you a little demon in your home?
If not
THEN GET ONE HERE.
Best prices. Every demon guaranteed housebroken.
If you are not satisfied, your money will be cheerfully refunded.

"Well, I'm damned!" Joe gasped, staring at the sign. "Have you a little demon in your home?' " He broke into laughter. Then, his instinct for news aroused, he entered the shop. He had to kill several hours anyhow.

It was a small shop, clean and tidy. It looked and smelled like a pet shop. The proprietor was not in sight, and looking around, Joe saw no demons. Nor was there any stock in trade visible, with the exception of a number of small glass boxes arrayed on shelves behind the counter. The boxes were empty.

"Hey!" Joe yelled, to attract the attention of the owner, who was no doubt in the back room. "You've got a customer."

"You vish to buy a demon, yas?" a voice at his elbow inquired.

Joe jumped and looked around. A man was standing right beside him, midget rather. The proprietor—if this was the proprietor—was not over four feet tall and he looked a lot like Dopey, from Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs.

"Where'd you come from so suddenly?" Joe demanded.

"I 'ave been here all the time," the dwarf said.

"You have?" Joe suspiciously looked the midget over. "I didn't see you."

"Perhaps you do not see well," the midget suggested.

"Perhaps," Joe said doubtfully. There were many things wrong with him but his eyesight was not included among them. However the dwarf seemed disinclined to explain his sudden appearance and Joe let the matter drop. "What's the gag, buddy?" he

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said, waving his hand at the sign in the window. "What's this racket about demons?"

Instantly the dwarf's face lighted up. "You vish to buy a demon, yas? Ah, that is good. I have an excellent selection to offer you—the very best quality, pick of the crop." The dwarf darted behind the counter and began yanking the glass boxes from the shelves.

"This one," he said, proudly exhibiting the box, "is a cross between a Maltese and a Persian. As you know, no doubt, this hybrid is not only very intelligent but is affectionate as well. See! Look at him." He proudly held the box up for Joe's inspection.

"Uck!" said Joe.

The box was empty.

"NOTE the beautiful coloring," the dwarf said. "A light powder blue. It he not beautiful?"

Joe stared at the box. He couldn't see a thing.

"His name is George," the dwarf continued.

"Does he answer to it?" Joe asked uncertainly.

"Oh, of course. My demons are all well trained," the dwarf assured him.

"U—m," said Joe.

"Perhaps you would like this one instead," the dwarf said, picking up another box. "This is a genuine oriental demon, originally from China. That is, his stock came from China, but of course that was many centuries ago. Perhaps you would prefer an oriental," the dwarf said, looking at Joe. "Some people do. The coloring, a pale yellow, is nice, but I find the orientals are inclined to be sulky, especially in dry weather."

"Oh," said Joe vaguely. "A little sulkiness doesn't hurt anything. What's the name of this one?"

"His name is Lao-sen," the dwarf said, "But I call him China Boy," he shyly added.

"China Boy," Joe said appraisingly. "That's a nice name."

The dwarf's face lit with pleasure at the praise. "Do you like it?" he said.

"I sure do," Joe said, staring at the box. "The color is nice too," he added.

The dwarf beamed.

"Do you—ah—have any others?" Joe questioned.

"Oh certainly, certainly," the dwarf said quickly. "If you have something particular in mind—" He looked questioningly at Joe.

"Oh no," Joe said vaguely. "Just let me see what you have."

The dwarf quickly piled dozens of boxes on the counter. "This one is Turkish," he said. "And this one is Armenian. . . ." He seemed quite happy to display his stock. Joe let him talk on. He was only slightly mystified by the fact that all of the glass boxes were empty.

"I don't believe," Joe said professionally, when the dwarf had pulled the last glass box from the shelves, "that I've ever seen a more complete stock. And every article in first class condition, too."

"Thank you," the dwarf said, blushing at this praise. "I do my best. Now," he continued briskly, "are you ready to make a selection?"

"Well," said Joe doubtfully. "I don't know. Are you—are you certain they're all housebroken?"

"Oh absolutely," the dwarf insisted. "You need have no fear about *that*. I train them personally." He seemed most positive on this point.

"U—m," said Joe. "If I buy one, how can I know he won't run away?"

"Not a chance, sir. The spell takes care of that. They couldn't run away if they wanted to. Besides, they won't want to. They are most affectionate,

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sir, most affectionate."

JOE imagined himself being nuzzled by an affectionate demon. He supposed it would be something like having a cat rub against your legs. Coming out of those small boxes, the demons certainly couldn't be larger than cats.

"And," the proprieter added brightly, "when they get old you can trade them in on a new one."

"That's a good point," Joe admitted. "But about feeding—"

"No trouble at all, sir. They will feed themselves. You won't have to bother with providing food. Now which one will you prefer, sir? You seemed to indicate a preference for China Boy, yas?"

"Well," Joe admitted. "China Boy has his points. But the color, I'm afraid, is not quite what I wanted. I'm slightly allergic to yellow."

"That's too bad," the dwarf said. "How about the Maltese hybrid, sir? How about George? He's a beautiful shade of powder blue."

"George," said Joe beaming, "will just be wonderful. That is, if the price is right. How much is George?"

"How much do you have?"

"Uck!" said Joe. He had a whole week's pay in his pocket but long training in lying to bill collectors had prepared him to meet this situation. "I'm afraid two dollars is all I have with me," he said hesitantly.

"That's just exactly the price I have on George!" the dwarf said. Quickly opening the box, he thrust a hand inside and then held it palm up toward his customer. Meanwhile he rattled off a string of words that Joe could not understand but which presumably were the charm that tied the demon to him.

There was a curious, strained expression on the reporter's face as he looked at the hand the dwarf had thrust toward him. It was obviously empty. But in spite of that he thrust the two dollars across the counter.

"Thank you, sir," the dwarf said. Gravely he thrust his hand toward his customer. A merchant closing a sale and handing an article to the purchaser would have used exactly the same gesture. With equal gravity Joe accepted the purchase. His fingers closed around nothingness but in spite of that he opened the pocket of his coat and seemingly dropped the demon in.

"Call again," the dwarf said.

The strained expression was still visible on Joe's face as he walked out of the shop. It stayed there until he was out of sight. Then it exploded—into violent laughter.

"Oh, lordy!" he gasped, tears running down his face. "This is the best gag I ever run into. A dwarf selling invisible demons!" The whole situation appealed to his sense of the ridiculous. He roared with laughter. "It may have cost two dollars but it was worth every cent!" he gasped.

HE was still laughing when he entered the saloon. A good honest laugh was all Joe Reed had ever asked from life. Once inside, he opened his pocket. "Hop out, George," he said. "Get down on the floor like a nice little demon. Stay close to papa now," he said, waving his finger reprovingly.

There were two customers in the saloon. An indifferent bartender was serving them. They regarded Joe with astonishment at first and then with suspicion.

Joe was still laughing. "It's all right, boys," he told the two men at the bar. "I'm only crazy. But it's not catching so you needn't worry." Doubled over with laughter he walked up to the bar and ordered beer.

"Dat's good," he heard one of the

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men say. Looking up he saw that one of the men had moved to his right. The other had moved to his left. They were standing very close to him.

"What is this?" he said angrily.

"Dis," the man on the right said, "is what is called luck."

"It soitingly is," the man on the left supplied. "Here we been lookin' for dis guy for weeks, and him stayin' hid all the time. And den, with no effort on our part, he comes walking right into our arms. Dat soitingly is luck."

"I don't get it," Joe said. A horrible weak feeling at the pit of his stomach told him that he did get it. A dreadful suspicion flashed into his mind. It was confirmed by a nod from the man at his right.

"Louie," the man at his right said, nodding. "Louie wants to see you, chum."

Joe promptly fainted.

CHAPTER III

A Proposition from Chicago Louie

"WELL, well, well," said Chicago Louie. "Ain't dis nice, now? *Ain't dis nice!* You ain't got no idea how glad I am to see you, chum?"

Joe Reed looked wildly around. He remembered fainting all right but he did not know what had happened after that. Apparently he had been brought to Louie's hideout by the two men who had accosted him in the saloon.

"I thought you were on the north side," he muttered, looking glassily at the gangster.

Louie shrugged. "We move around," he said. "Which is," he continued, fixing his eye on the squirming reporter, "more than you will be doin' in the future, pal."

"What do you mean?" Joe gasped.

"I mean I never heard of nobody movin' around much after he had been sewed up in a sack and dumped in the river!" Louie explained.

At the words, a convulsive shudder passed through Joe's body. He had dreamed that the gangsters would catch him and dump him in the river. They had caught him and that was what they were going to do with him!

"You can't do that!" he shouted.

Louie seemed to take a purely academic interest in the matter. "Why can't we?" he asked.

"Because—" Trying to think of a reason, Joe's dream came back to him. "You sniveling, cowardly rats," he said. "Don't you realize you can't touch a reporter in this town? The Star will put ten thousand dollars on the head of each of you. You will be hunted from New York to San Diego. The second you touch a hair of my head you will be signing your own death warrant and you know it. Open that door and let me out of here."

He spoke firmly, his voice resonant. The two gorillas looked at Chicago Louie. They laughed. Louie laughed.

"You talk like you ain't got good sense, chum," Louie said. "How will that dirty rag you work for put a reward out for us when they don't know who got you? How will they know what happened to you? It's a cinch nobody will ever find you, where we're gonna put you. They'll just think you went on another drunk, and forgot to come back this time." He laughed uproariously. "And anyhow, if *you* turn up missing, and we put your corpse in a wheelbarrow and pushed it up main street with big signs saying we had knocked you off, all that would happen would be that we would get a vote of thanks for knockin' off a public nuisance. Hah, hah, hah. Get wise to yourself, chump. Nobody cares what happens to you."

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SWEAT was rolling down Joe Reed's face and getting into his eyes. In his dream he had disposed of these gangsters with a few well-chosen words. Using the same words now had not produced the same results. Things happened in dreams that couldn't happen in real life. Joe Reed suddenly had the feeling that he had been dreaming all his life. He had thought he was a big shot. Instead—

"Nobody cares what happens to you, chump!" Louie repeated, laughing.

"Don't—" Joe begged. "Don't dump me in the river. I won't write another story about you, ever. I promise."

"What good is *your* promise?" Louie sneered.

"I mean it."

"Yeah? Listen, you writing rat, you never meant anything you said in your whole life!"

"I mean it this time."

"Sure," Louie nodded. "You mean it now. But if we turned you loose, how long would you mean it?"

"I—" For once in his life, words failed Joe Reed. Sweat had already run down the back of his neck, wilting his collar; it was now running down inside his soul, wilting that.

"You got one chance," Louie said.

"A—a chance?" Joe stuttered.

"Yeah. You write a story saying all the other stories you wrote were lies—"

"A story saying all the other stories were lies!" Joe gasped. "But I can't do that. The stories were true. You *were* head of a racket. You were cleaning up."

Louie didn't bother to answer. He looked at the two gorillas. "Boys," he said.

Grinning, the two men stepped forward. Joe took one look at the two men and his soul curled up like a wilted lettuce leaf. He knew what they were going to do—beat hell out of him. In his experience as a reporter he had seen a few men after gangsters got through working on them. They were scarcely recognizable as human. And these two gorillas were going to give him the same treatment.

"I'll write the story," he whispered.

The two thugs looked disappointed. "Boss, can't we work him over a little anyway?" one of them asked plaintively.

"Not yet," said Louie. "Start writing, rat," he said to Joe.

"You mean I have to write it here?"

"Sure," Louie nodded. "And we're gonna keep you here until it's printed too." He laughed. "You don't think we'd let you out of our sight until you've delivered the goods, do you, chump?"

Joe shuddered. He had never intended to write the story. Once out of the clutches of the gangsters, he would have laughed at them.

"I'll write it," he whispered. "I don't know whether Trigger will print it but I'll write it."

"Trigger will print it all right," Louie assured him. If he had not been in such a daze, Joe would have wondered how the gangster could be so certain the city editor would print anything that was turned in to him. But this was not his problem. His problem was to write the story.

HE wrote it, in longhand, on yellow sheets. It retracted everything he had said in his previous stories and it made Chicago Louie a model citizen who was the victim of newspaper persecution. Joe shuddered as he wrote it. Never in a thousand years would Trigger print it.

"Here it is," he said at last. "But how are you going to get it printed?"

"That's easy," Louie said, reading the story. "We're just gonna send one of your fingers along with it. If it don't

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come out in the paper today, why tomorrow we'll send another finger. If Trigger holds out until we run out of fingers, why we'll send a hand, then an arm, and after that, a leg. You work for Trigger. He'll have to print the story to save your neck. All right, boys," said Chicago Louie, nodding at the two gorillas. "You can take off his little finger, first, to send along with this beautiful story."

Louie grinned. The two men advanced, grinning. Joe stared at them. He was too scared to move. One of them grabbed him.

"Help!" he gulped. "Help—"

Simultaneously the man who had grabbed him uttered a scream like an Indian on the warpath and jumped two feet high, hastily releasing Joe.

"Somethin' bit me!" he yelled. "It bit me in the leg."

Forgetting Joe, he looked down at the floor to see what had attacked him.

"What's wrong with you, you damned fool?" Louie grated, rising to his feet and pulling a gun at the same time. "Have you got the willies?"

"Something bit me, boss," the gangster insisted. He pulled up his trouser leg to examine the wound.

No wound was visible.

"Where's the place?" Louie asked harshly.

"There ain't no place," the bewildered gangster answered. "But I tell you it bit me just the same."

"Nuts!" Louie said. "If anything bites you, it's gotta leave a place, ain't it? And there ain't no place, is there? And there ain't nothing in here to bite you anyhow. So get back to business and take a finger off of this guy. We ain't got all day."

The gang leader waved his gun at the two gorillas.

Joe was standing stock still, staring at the floor. The three thugs looked at him. It was obvious that he was paying no attention to them at all. He seemed to have forgotten them completely. There was a glassy, dazed look in his eyes.

They cared nothing for glassy looks. They started toward him.

"Get 'em, George," the reporter said.

Joe *had* forgotten the gangsters. He had forgotten the fix he was in. He had forgotten everything, in rapt astonishment at one amazing fact that made everything else of little importance.

There was something on the floor. He could barely see it. It was wavy, indistinct, scarcely visible. He could just see enough of it to tell that it was about five inches high. It looked like a tiny manikin, like the pictures of imps one sees in illustrations of the inferno. It had a sharp face and pointed ears.

It was a beautiful shade of powder blue.

It had a long pointed tail.

WHEN Joe said, "Get 'em, George," it raced a few feet across the floor, then running forward with incredible speed, it jabbed that pointed tail into the calf of Chicago Louie's leg.

If the ceiling had not stopped him, Chicago Louie would have jumped forty feet high. "Ouch!" he screamed.

"Now the other one, George," Joe said.

The little creature backed up again. And again it raced across the floor so fast it was only an indistinct streak of blue. The pointed tail rammed home in the leg of the third gangster.

"Hell and damnation!" the thug screamed. "I'm killed."

He wasn't killed. But he was terribly, terribly surprised.

Joe Reed had also been surprised. But he was fast on his mental trigger. He remembered that he had bought a demon. At the time he had thought it was a gag. Apparently it wasn't a gag.

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Apparently the dwarf had delivered the goods. Certainly there was a tiny creature on the floor that answered to the name of George. For some reason it had been invisible when he bought it and he could barely see it now. Seemingly the three gangsters could not see it at all. Perhaps it became visible only to its owner and then only after he had had it in his possession for a few hours. Whatever the reason for its invisibility, Joe could see it now. Its tiny eyes twinkling, it was looking up to him for further orders. He gave them.

"Give 'em hell, George," he shouted. "Stick that hot tail in them and pull it out and stick it in again. Work 'em over, George. Make 'em wish they had never been born."

Later accounts, collected from diverse sources, differed as to exactly what happened after that. But all agreed on one thing—hell had broken loose on the south side. There were terrible cries of fear and screams of agony. There were shrieks of pain. Then there was the crash of breaking furniture and eventually the rattle of breaking glass.

A cop, attracted by the noise, came galloping down the street. He was just in time to see Joe Reed stick his head out the window.

"Call the wagon," Joe Reed said. "I got three thugs all laid out in a row up here."

Attacked by a creature they could not see, the gangsters had been too busy trying to defend themselves to think about Joe. The reporter had selected a heavy chair. One by one, he had brought it down over the heads of the gangsters. The chair had been demolished. So had the gangsters.

"Here, George," Joe said, as the cops came pounding up the stairs.

Barely visible, the demon raced up his leg and perched on his arm. Joe gravely patted the little creature.

"I apologize, George," he said, "for not believing in you just because I couldn't see you. You're a fine boy, George, a fine boy."

The demon began to purr. The sound was like the hiss of steam softly escaping from a kettle.

"With you to help me," Joe said, carefully putting the demon in his pocket, "I have a hunch I'll go far in this world."

CHAPTER IV

The Conquering Hero

THE Star, like all good newspapers, maintained numerous listening posts about the city, including one at police headquarters. Consequently the news of the capture of Chicago Louie and two of his henchmen arrived in the office of the paper before Joe did. But not much before. The city room had barely begun to seethe with speculation when the door was kicked open and Joe strode in.

He was the conquerer entering a fallen city, he was the victor home with the spoils, he was the marathon runner coming to claim the laurel wreath. All that was lacking on his entrance was a fanfare of trumpets and he looked as if he was expecting that. His shoulders straight, his chin up, he looked like a man with a million dollars in his pocket.

The final edition was already rumbling through the presses in the rooms below.

"Stop the presses!" Joe said.

Once started, those presses stopped for tidal waves, earthquakes, and declarations of war. Trigger's mouth hung open when he heard the words.

"I said to stop the presses," Joe said.

A look of awe on his face, Trigger picked up the phone that connected his office with the pressroom. He stopped the presses.

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Reporters, rewrite men, men from the copy desk, copy boys, all the staff was there, including two photographers who came hurrying in and began to snap flashbulbs as fast as they could screw them into the sockets. In all this confusion Joe Reed stood and smiled. The only person he needed for the scene to be perfect was Janie. He looked around for her but she did not seem to be present to witness his triumph.

Janie could read about it later, however.

"Now," said Joe, when the staff had gathered around him, "I'll write the story."

He went to his battered typewriter and began to pound out the magic words.

"Alone, unarmed, Joseph Reed, ace newsman of the Star, invaded the hideout of Chicago Louie, notorious gangster, and two of his men, and singlehandedly effected their capture this afternoon—"

Trigger was reading over his shoulder. "My God!" the city editor gasped, "you mean you went right in there all by yourself and took them rats in?"

"Sure thing," Joe said, over his shoulder.

"And they had machine guns and pistols—"

"I didn't see any machine guns, but they had plenty of pistols," Joe said. He continued writing. Trigger continued reading. There was a look of rapt awe on his face. Trigger was old and wise in the ways of sin, but he had never seen anything like this, and had never expected to.

THE story was a knockout. "Reporter defies guns of gangsters. Undaunted by the fact that the men were armed, this daring newsman marched up to them. 'You're under arrest,' he quietly said. 'Yeah?' said Chicago Louie. There was death in the gangster's eyes. One hand darted toward his gun. 'No, you don't,' said the reporter, wrenching the weapon away from him. In a flash he had turned the gun on them. The gangsters, having no choice, were forced to surrender their weapons to this intrepid reporter."

Trigger choked.

"As a reward for his gallantry and cool bravery," Joe wrote, "the Star will increase the salary of Joseph Reed to seventy-five dollars a week and pay him a bonus of one thousand dollars. 'It's the least we can do,' the city editor said. 'We only wish it could be more. The newspaper world needs men like this.'

When he read this, Trigger's eyes slowly started to bulge out of his head. First his face got white and tense and then it slowly began to turn red. He swallowed, and then swallowed again.

"I'll see you in hell for a million years before I'll pay you seventy-five dollars a week!" Trigger said. "And that thousand dollar bonus, that's out. Do you understand, that's out."

"I'm going to get married," Joe said quietly. "I'll need the money to take a honeymoon."

"I don't give a damn what you need the money for. We'll raise you to forty-five dollars a week, and not a cent more. And the thousand dollar bonus is strictly out."

"Is it?" said Joe.

Trigger was a bad, bad man. He wanted stories but the thought of paying the men who wrote them for him drove him to the verge of apoplexy. "We'll give you a ten dollar bonus," he raged. "And not a penny more."

"George," said Joe quietly. "Do your stuff."

There is much confusion as to what happened after that. Even newspaper men, trained to observe and report events accurately, sometimes are at a

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loss to tell exactly what happened. Especially when it happens so fast. And in the city room of the Star things began to happen fast.

Trigger, trembling with rage, was shouting at the top of his voice that no reporter was ever worth seventy-five dollars a week. Suddenly he stopped shouting. A look of intense, frantic surprise crossed his face. He looked bewilderedly around, as if he thought somebody had kicked him from behind. He saw no one close enough to kick him.

"Who—" he began. That was as far as he got. Again the look of frantic surprise appeared on his face. "Ouch!" he screamed at the top of his voice.

AFTER that, confusion reigned. Trigger dashed round and round the room, screaming that something was biting him. This spectacle was beheld first with incredulity and then with unrepressed joy by the slaves who worked for him. If something was biting Trigger, it was all right with them.

It was still all right with them when Trigger, cornered on top of his desk and faced by a stern Joe Reed, sweatingly yielded to the demands of the reporter.

"And," said Joe coldly, "if you think you can change your mind on this, just remember that something will start biting you in the leg and will keep on biting you until I tell it to stop."

It was at this point that Trigger fainted. He didn't know what was happening. All he knew was that something was biting him, something that Joe Reed seemed to control. Trigger was not superstitious. He never thought of an invisible demon. All he thought was that he had better do what Joe wanted him to do, and do it quickly.

"Good going, George," Joe said. "Good going." At the praise he could hear the demon purr. "With you to help me," he said gratefully, "I'll really go places in this world."

He was flushed with triumph. The fact that he had written a wholly fictitious account of the capture of Chicago Louie did not bother him. With the aid of George, he could see himself becoming city editor of this paper, perhaps even managing editor. There was nothing he couldn't do. Nothing! And as for bill collectors, those evil creatures— He laughed. George was perfect medicine for them.

He was still wallowing in his triumph when the presses started again and the papers carrying his story began to hit the streets. A circle of admiring reporters surrounded him. All he needed was Janie. Then Janie entered.

She had a final edition of the Star clutched in her hands when she came into the city room. Joe started toward her. He wasted no time.

"Janie," he said, "will you marry me?"

She held the paper in front of him. "Is this true?" she demanded, pointing to the story he had written.

"Every word of it," Joe answered fervently.

A pained expression crossed her face. "I mean about the bonus and the raise." Significantly, she did not direct this question at Joe directly, but at the room at large.

"Yes, it's true," a dozen voices assured her at the same time. "Trigger himself said so."

"In that case," she said, turning to Joe, "I'll marry you." There was a strange smile on her face as she spoke the words. "I've always loved you, Joe, but in the past you were so irresponsible and careless that I couldn't marry you. Now that you have reformed," she smiled again, "I will be glad to marry you, Joe."

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ECSTASY flowed into the heart of Joe Reed. "Janie!" he shouted, kissing her. He had everything that a man could want. A raise and a thousand dollar bonus. He was a hero and the girl of his life had just said "Yes."

"Come on," he babbled. "Let's get out of here—where we can talk."

Joe Reed was walking on air as they left the building. This was the hour of his triumph, this was the day destiny had planned for him. The whole world lay beneath his feet, ready to be walked on; he would not hesitate to walk on it.

Then a voice shouted in his ear, a rough, raucous voice. "You pay me that eight bucks, guy, or else!" the voice said.

Startled, Joe looked around. It was a bill collector.

"Sorry, buddy," Joe said automatically. "I'll take care of you next payday."

"You've been telling me that for a year now," the collector said harshly. "I'm getting tired of your hot air. I want my money."

"This is going to be good," Joe thought. "This is going to be really good." He could scarcely restrain his laughter. Imagine the nerve of anybody trying to collect a bill from a man who owned a demon like George!

"Pay the man, Joe," Janie said quietly.

"You keep out of this," he said. "I'm sorry, my good man," he continued, turning to the bill collector. "I find myself short just at the moment. However I will take care of you next week, *sure!*"

He was lying on both counts. He had the money in his pocket and he wouldn't pay the bill next week.

"I want my money," the collector belligerently said. "If I don't get it, I'm going to take it out of your hide."

The man was becoming a nuisance. It was time to put him in his place. Joe glanced down. Barely visible at his feet was a wavy smudge of powder blue. It was the demon, eagerly waiting to go into action. The pointed tail was waving in the air.

"All right, George," Joe started to say. He got the word "All—" out of his mouth.

"Get him, China Boy!" Janie Rice said.

A LOOK of mad, incredulous surprise stamped itself on Joe Reed's face. One second he was standing there gloating over what he was going to do to this obstreperous bill collector. The next second he was dancing a jig, trying to keep both feet off the ground at the same time.

Every time one foot touched the ground something bit him in the calf of his leg. "Ouch!" he screamed. "Ouch! Ouch! Ouch!"

The bill collector stared at him in consternation. Passersby stopped to gaze at this spectacle. Only Janie Rice remained unmoved.

"Pay the man, Joe," she calmly said. "Pay the man."

"You!" he gulped, gazing at her.

"Yes," she nodded. "I own China Boy. Now pay the man and I'll call off my demon."

Joe paid. It was probably the first time in his life that he was ever glad to pay a bill.

"I followed you," Janie said, when the bill collector had been paid and had departed. "I know everything that happened." Her voice was stern and forbidding. "You never intended to interview Chicago Louie, Joe. The address Trigger gave you was on the north side and you went south. You intended to fake the story. And you didn't find Chicago Louie. His men found you. The story you wrote was a lie from be-

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ginning to end. There wasn't a word of truth in it."

In consternation, Joe stared at her. She knew the awful truth!

"Oh, I won't tell on you," she said, seeing his look. "Especially since you've reformed, I won't tell on you."

"Reformed?" Joe gulped.

"Yes," Janie nodded firmly. "If you ever fake another story, Joe; if you ever take more than one drink at a time, if you ever refuse to pay a bill when you have the money to pay it, if you are ever irresponsible again—" She paused, looked down at her feet.

Joe followed her gaze. Barely visible at her feet, he caught a glimpse of yellow. The pronged tail was quivering with eagerness. It was pointing straight at him.

"If you are ever tempted," Janie said. "Just remember China Boy. I found the demon shop too, Joe, and I bought China Boy especially to look after you. From now on, Joe, you will have something you never had in your life—a conscience."

For the second time that eventful day, Joe Reed fainted.

IT is interesting to note, in connection with this strange romance, that the marriage turned out very well. There was some slight difficulty at first, but in time Joe Reed became a model husband and an excellent provider. Always attentive to his wife, always courteous and always kind, he was the envy of other wives whose husbands were often careless and forgetful. But Joe Reed was never forgetful and never careless, never again.

It is also interesting to note that he and Janie, driven by curiosity, again sought out the shop that sold demons. They found the place all right but the shop was empty, deserted. There was a sheriff's notice of eviction on the door. They were unable to ascertain what had happened to the dwarf who ran the shop. Possibly he went out of business forever. And, on the other hand, it is possible that he may have moved to another location, and on some quiet side street is today selling his stock of demons.

As to the Reeds, they eventually learned, to their perturbed surprise, that the dwarf had made a mistake. China Boy was China Boy all right, but George's name should really have been Georgia. The results are such that the Reeds are convinced they will never be without a little demon in their home.

MYSTERY OF THE HUMAN RADIO

NOT so very long ago, a man sauntered into a large New York radio station with a complaint to make. Since he lived rather close to this station, he claimed that whatever they were doing to put their programs out into the ether was making his life a little tough. It seemed that every minute he spent in his house he could hear the broadcasts of the moment coming from that station.

He was asked if it came from any of the plumbing or pipe connections in his home. He shook his head. He was certain that the sound seemed to come directly, right out of the air.

The radio men were skeptical.

"All right," they asked, "what's on the air from our station at the moment?" They were in a soundproof studio, and it would be impossible for their visitor to know.

Much to their astonishment, they heard him answer correctly. They decided to have a look-see, a check-up, on this walking radio. The technical staff present at the moment was summoned. Questioning began. At length it was learned that he was employed by a carborundum factory, and his job was the breaking of carborundum.

The solution was suddenly clear. Carborundum had somehow attached itself to the fillings in this fellow's teeth. Examination verified this. And the radio station gentlemen carefully explained to their visitor that any oxidized or rusty metallic surface can rectify powerful electromagnetic waves and turn them into regular sound waves. That's what had happened to the visitor. He was a veritable crystal set, and would continue to be so, until he brushed his teeth more thoroughly after returning from work each night!

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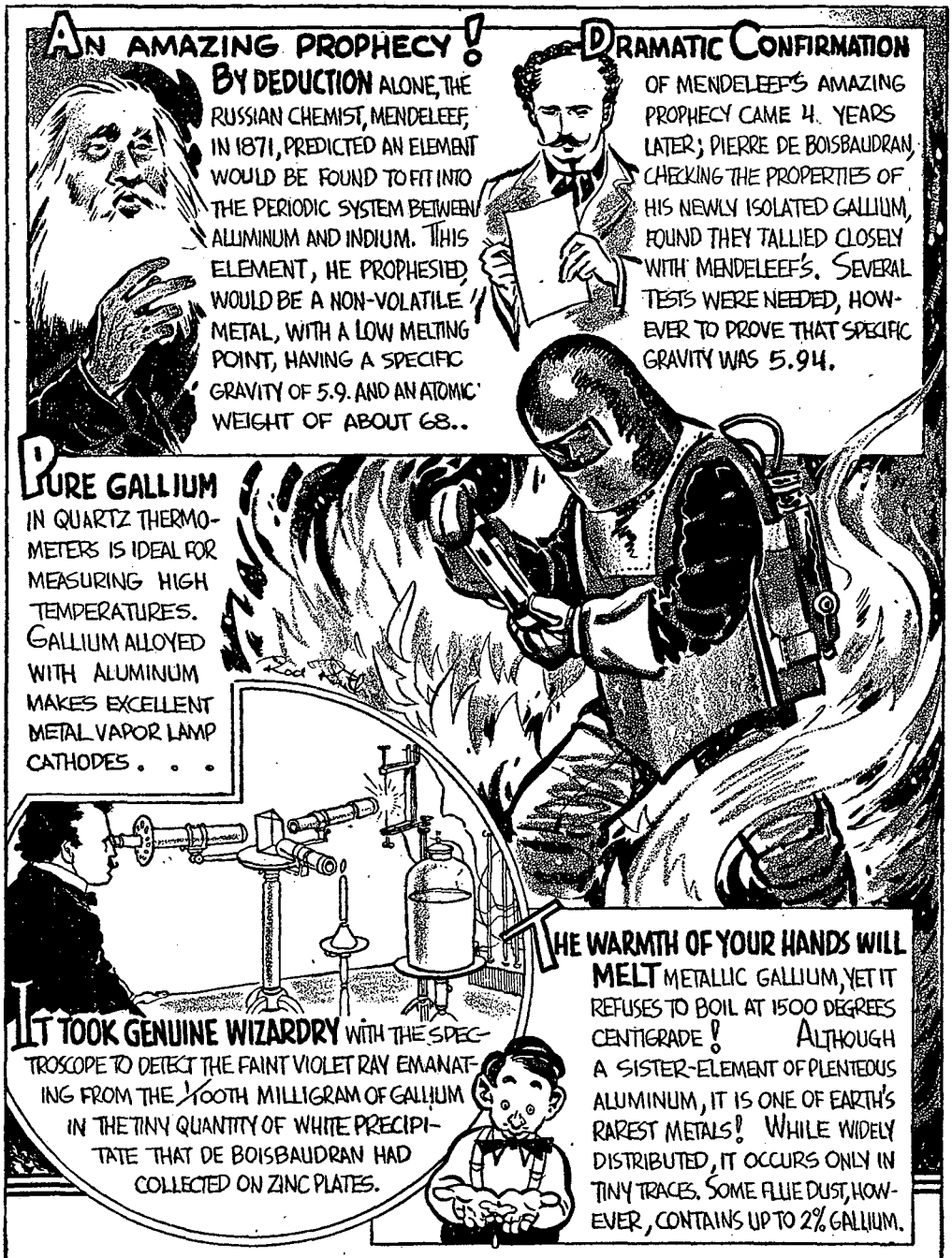
Romance of the Elements - - - Gallium



GALLIUM is number 31 in the International Table of Atomic Weights. Its symbol is Ga and its atomic weight is 69.72. It is a metallic element of steel-grey color, melts at 30.15° C and boils at about 1700° C. Specific gravity in solid state is 5.885 and in liquid 6.081. It is one of the scarcest of elements, although occurring widely in minute nature in zinc blendes and bauxite. Used in optical mirrors; metal vapor lamps. When heated it gives off a very beautiful ruby-red light.

NEXT MONTH—The Romance of Germanium

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The BEAUTY and the BEASTIES

by DAVID WRIGHT O'BRIEN

Charlie Bright was a dirty, lousy blackmailer. It was only just that he should drink one of Saki's cocktails—and turn into the rat he was!

I TOLD Saki — he's my oriental screwball houseboy—not to bother going to the door. I let Charlie Bright in personally.

"Hello palsie-walsie," he smirked. "Everything all set?"

I wanted to punch him in his pimpled face. That was Charlie Bright. He didn't even have the decency to drop his irritating air of jauntiness when out collecting blackmail.

"I have the money." I said. "Ten thousand in cash."

Charlie Bright threw his loudly-tailored self into my favorite overstuffed chair. He fished into into his pocket and drew forth a gold cigarette case from which he extracted a long, gold-tipped fag on which the initials C. B. were inscribed in gold. He didn't offer me one, and stuffed the case back into his pocket.

"The girl here?" he demanded. "The one you're going to marry tomorrow, I mean?"

I shook my head.

"She doesn't know a thing about this," I said, "and she never will. Understand?"

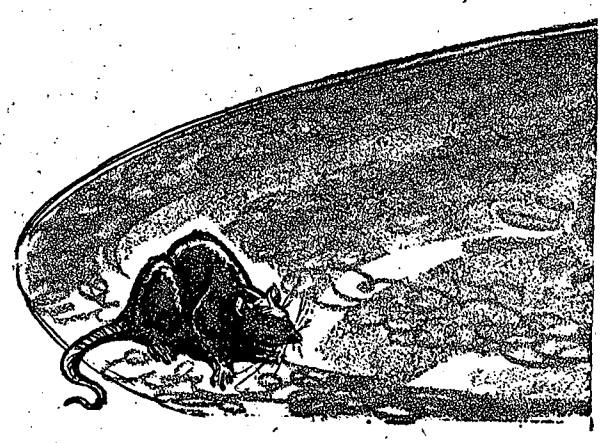
"Sure, sure," said Charlie Bright. "Trust your pal Charlie." He let his beady eyes sweep swiftly over the apartment. "Any devices around?" he demanded.

"I don't get you."

"Dictaphones," said Charlie Bright. "'Cause if there are, you're a damned chump. They'll only make you more trouble than you bargained for. Then all the Corwin dirty linen will come out in the wash, and your little bride-to-be, Wendy Corwin, will be a pretty miserable kid."

"Leave her name out of this!" I wasn't kidding, as melodramatic as it sounded. Then I said, "You needn't worry, there are no dictaphones concealed in the apartment."

"How about the dough?" demanded my visitor. He scratched the fingers



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"Velly fine!" said Saki enthusiastically. "Saki's cocktail fix Cholly Blight plenty!"

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of one clawlike paw in the palm of the other. "Fork over."

"Where is the record?" I demanded, countering. I had the cash in my pocket. But it wasn't going to leave my pocket until I had the stolen, time worn, prison record Bright was holding me up for. The prison record of Wendy's father, old Cornelius Corwin.

Wendy's father, a respected and well loved local figure, had been dead five years now. But Charlie Bright, cunning ferret that he was, had gone back fifty years into the old man's past and dug up the fact that he had escaped from a Colorado prison farm in his youth.

Now Bright was threatening to break the news—on the day of our wedding—that Wendy was the daughter of an ex-convict. The fact that old Cornelius Corwin had been as honest and decent a citizen as New York had ever seen, and had been a model of the straight and narrow ever since his first and only youthful misdemeanor, didn't influence Charlie Bright. Things like that never did.

"Let's see that dough," Charlie Bright repeated nasally.

But the ten grand Bright wanted in exchange for the only existing record was worth it to me. Worth it to save Wendy the shame and suffering and humiliation that Bright's rotten nationally-syndicated column could cause her. And Bright had been shrewd enough to guess as much.

"You have the record with you?" I demanded again.

At this point Saki took it upon himself to thrust his brown and grinning presence into the room.

"Allo," Saki beamed. "Boss Duane have guest?"

Charlie Bright looked at me sharply. "I thought we were alone."

"Just my houseboy, Saki," I said. "He doesn't matter."

Saki grinned and bowed briefly.

"Saki fix 'em dlink for gentlemens."

I started to protest. Bright could have my dough but not my hospitality. But Saki had darted back into the kitchen and I could hear cabinet doors slamming as he searched for the mixings. Charlie Bright was grinning.

"That's real hospitable of you, palsie-walsie," he smirked.

"Don't call me palsie-walsie. Where is the record?" I grated.

"Time enough for that," Bright said, "after we have a friendly little drink. Then you can get rid of your houseboy. I don't want anyone around when the actual transfer is made."

I WANTED to wring his neck. But until I got my hands on that record there was nothing I could do. I slouched down on a divan and irritably reached for a cigarette. Saki—still grinning like the utterly benighted ass that he is—brought the drinks in five minutes later. He put them down on a center table.

There were six drinks on the tray. I had never been able to drum it into Saki's thick skull that a cocktail set of six pieces doesn't necessarily have to be used completely each time. But Saki never savvied. Six glasses in set, six drinks every time — no matter how many guests I had, two or eight.

Charlie Bright reached out and helped himself, downing the first drink in a gulp and promptly taking a second. I picked up one and sipped it slowly.

Saki stood there, grinning happily from Bright to me and back again. He was like a bowery waiter in a clip joint hovering about for a tip.

"All right, Saki," I said. "You can beat it. Take the night off. See your Mott Street girl friend."

Charlie Bright had finished his

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second drink. There seemed to be a peculiar expression on his features. Saki was still grinning like a Bhudda who's just overeaten pleasurably.

I finished my drink and put it down a little irritably.

"All right, Saki," I repeated. "You heard what I said. Scram please."

Saki shook his head.

"No, Boss Duane, must watch." His button eyes were fixed unwaveringly on Charlie Bright.

"Saki," I demanded, "what in the devil's eating you?" I turned to look at Charlie Bright.

Charlie Bright was gone!

Before I could catch my breath, Saki was smilingly explaining to me.

'Saki tell you no like pimple fella. Saki tell him is bad. Saki know he come bothel you—try stop wedding malliage tomorrow. Saki fix him ancest'lial dlink—old lecipie."

I was on my feet.

"Saki!" I managed. "What in the name of all that's unholy have you done?"

Saki grinned reassuringly and stepped over to my armchair. He pushed it back. There, squeaking hysterically beneath it, was a black scrawny rat!

"See, Boss Duane. Is Chollie Blight!" *Saki pointed happily at the frantically squeaking rat.*

In times like that you don't stop to reason things out.

"What?" I screamed. "Charlie Bright —that rat?"

Saki nodded, pointing to the cocktail tray.

"Is flum dlink I mix 'em," he explained proudly.

To my dazed senses this much was becoming clear. *Saki was insisting that from some ancient recipe he had mixed Charlie Bright a drink that had turned him into a rat!*

"Saki!" I said, recoiling in horror at the thought of what he'd done.

"Is nothing," Saki said with becoming modesty.

"Nothing!" I began hysterically.

But Saki's jaw suddenly went foolishly slack, and he clapped one round palm to his brown brow in horrow. He was the picture of sudden consternation.

"Oh woe!" Saki shrieked. "Oh gleat tlouble and anguish!" His button eyes were now fixed on me with despair.

"Wha—" I began.

"Saki fo'get. Is tellible. Saki fo'-get! he moaned.

"Forget what?" I demanded harshly.

"Saki fo'get that Boss Duane dlink cockeltail tooooooo!" he wailed forlornly, his trembling finger pointing in my direction. "Is awfulll!"

Saki was suddenly much taller than I was. In fact I had to crane my neck to look up at his troubled oriental countenance. *For I was down on the floor on all fours. Down on the floor and wagging my tail hysterically. I was a dog!*

WHEN you become a dog, especially unexpectedly, there are plenty of adjustments that have to be made as quickly as possible. If you don't think so, try it some time. I was down on the floor and wagging my tail and looking up at the anguished moon face of Saki, and going a little bit loony from the shock of it all.

I guess I did a lot of wild running around in circles, snapping at Saki's fat ankles—possibly prompted by revenge and anger at his super-colossal stupidity. I remember vaguely that Charlie Bright, now in the form of a rat, was squeaking around the vicinity with about the same amount of hysteria.

Saki, however, filled with the remorse and resignation that only an Oriental

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can adopt, teetered brokenly out into the kitchen where he seized on the nearest bottle and began to drive away the anguish and sorrow of his blunder in drink.

Finally I stopped barking and running around. I left Saki, already well on his way to completely blissfully stupor, crouched atop the kitchen table, weeping copiously, and muttering drunkenly, "Is bad. Is so velly bad. Is most awful than that!"

I went back into the living room to look for Charlie Bright. He was s q u e a k i n g indignantly still, and crouched trembling near a rat hole—possibly to use as an avenue of escape should I light out after him.

"Stop squeaking and snivelling!" I told him, and my voice was a bark of course.*

It wasn't particularly amazing that I could understand his squeaks with the same ease that I'd formerly listened to his normal conversation. After what Saki had done to us, nothing was surprising.

"Why in the hell did you do this to me?" Charlie Bright squeaked in terror. "Just so you could take advantage of your superior size as a dog?"

"Don't be an ass," I barked. "What happened to you was Saki's idea. What happened to me was an accident. If I'd wanted to take advantage of superior size I could have beaten you up when we were both normal. Incidentally, what sort of a dog am I?"

"You're a collie," Charlie Bright squeaked, still hovering near the safety exit of his rat hole. "But what difference does that make?"

"Well if I have to be a dog," I answered, "I'd certainly like to know a little something about what kind of a dog I am. Glad to know I'm a thorobred," I concluded.

"What's that got to do with it?" Charlie Bright squeaked in rat-like suspicion.

"It just occurred to me," I replied, "that's Saki's cocktails had varying effects on each of us. I became a dog. You became a rat."

"So what?" squeaked Charlie Bright.

"So I could have been the rat and you could have been the dog, except for one obvious item."

"What's that?" my rat visitor squeaked.

"As a human being my personality was most closely related to that of a fine, loyal, courageous dog," I answered, laying it on a little thick to make the contrast nastier. "But you, you were a rat from the start, so you're a rat now."

"I don't like you, Duane Thomas," Charlie Bright squealed venomously, his rat body shaking with rage. "I'll get you for this if it's the last thing I do!"

"Yes," I said, and I enjoyed the mental picture I painted, "you ought to run right down to your dirty column office this minute and write some nasty things about me. Go ahead, they'd all love to see you as you are now. It's so realistic." It helped my own situation somewhat to put the barbs into Charlie Bright. After all, there were worse things than being a dog.

CHARLIE BRIGHT suddenly scurried to the opening of the rat hole.

"I think I hear someone coming," he shrilled. "You'd better hide, too." I

* All down through the ages, the folklore of all races contain stories of men and women who were transformed into animals through the use of a magic incantation or a weird potion concocted of strange herbs and minerals. All of legend seems to have some basis in fact, and a belief that is so predominant must have some truth in it somewhere. So, before we reject the weird stories that tell of Jekyll-and-Hyde transformations, we ought first to reject everything else in old folk-stories. And we can hardly do that and remain within reason—Ed.

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saw his tail flick into the darkness of the rat hole, and wondered why I'd never noticed it before, small tho it was. I'd have to speak to the building managers the first thing in the morning. After all—And then I remembered that a dog would look pretty silly complaining to a building manager.

Then I heard the knocking on the door. The knocking that had sent Charlie Bright scurrying away to safety. There was a voice accompanying the knocking.

"Oh, Saki. Saki, or Duane. For goodness sakes, will someone answer this door before I wear my knuckles out on it?"

The voice belonged to Wendy Corwin —the lovely blonde angel who was scheduled to march to the altar in less than twenty-four hours to be my bride!

I had forgotten about Wendy. I had forgotten about the wedding. You can't be expected to undergo the tremendous shock that I had suffered in those past dreadful minutes and still remember things. You can't even be expected to keep your sanity. Somehow I had managed to do the last named, but as for recalling the fact that I was on the verge of becoming a husband—well, it took Wendy's voice to bring that back to me.

The door must have been slightly ajar, for I heard it swing back, and Wendy's footsteps were in the hall.

"Hey there," she called. "Duane darling, are you home?"

I started to trot forward to meet her, then stopped abruptly in my tracks. The horror of the situation, the tremendous embarrassment and confusion involved, swept over me in a terrifying wave. I couldn't meet my future wife in this fashion. I couldn't sally blithely forth and say, "Pip pip, old dear. Don't be alarmed. I've just been turned into a dog, donchaknow!"

No, I most certainly couldn't do that. Quickly, I looked about for a place of refuge. There was room enough behind the divan to hold and hide a good-sized collie—which I was. I made a quick leap and bound in that direction, just as Wendy, looking as beautiful as ten million angels, poked her lovely blonde head curiously into the room.

HIDING there trembling behind the divan I had a little more time to analyze the situation. I could hear Wendy moving through the living room and out into the kitchen from which Saki's drunken, moroseful babblings still issued.

And with my additional analysis of the situation, I realized that I had acted wisely in hiding. After all, I was probably quite a good looking collie and all that, but there was a certain vague sense of nakedness offered to my new condition. I found time to wish I'd been turned into a long haired sheep dog, or had been attired in a blanket before my transformation.

Then, too, I wasn't at all certain as to how I was going to explain this change to Wendy. For I had a hunch that my conversation, even though understandable to others of the animal world, would be nothing but a series of unintelligible barks and yelps to a human.

No—I concluded—there was no chance of making my situation known to Wendy.

"Saki!" I heard Wendy's voice come explosively from the kitchen, "what on earth has happened to you?"

I could hear Saki mutter something incoherent.

"Where is Mister Duane?" Wendy's voice demanded. "Where is Mister Duane, and why are you drinking up all his private stock?"

Evidently Saki's reply was quite un-

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intelligible, for I heard Wendy's exasperated sigh, and then her heels clicked angrily out of the kitchen.

"I'm going to wait right here," I heard her shout to Saki, "until Mister Duane comes home. He'll make you sorry you ever got drunk." Her voice was much louder and she must have been approaching the divan, for suddenly it creaked slightly under the weight of a trim body depositing itself angrily.

I crouched there trying to hold my breath. Collies breath a bit more loudly than humans, you know. I heard the divan stir slightly, as if Wendy were leaning forward. There was the faintest clinking sound—I didn't realize what it was right then—and then Wendy sighed slightly.

When I heard the faint clinking sound again, I knew—with a sudden flush of horror—that it was the noise of a glass being put back on a tray!

Wendy had gulped one of Saki's terrible cocktails!

Scrambling wildly, I managed to extricate myself from behind the divan. *Managed to extricate myself just in time to see an incredibly beautiful Persian cat leap gracefully down from the cushions!*

"Wendy!" I barked. "My God, honey, it's happened to you too!"

The cat stopped abruptly, backing up and glaring in wild suspicion and terror at me.

"Wendy!" I barked again. "Don't be afraid, honey. It's Duane. I'm a dog!"

Wendy's voice was softly undertoned by a purr.

"Duane?" she asked, and I could tell that she was doing a brave job of fighting off hysteria. "What's happened to us, Duane?"

I had to hand it to Wendy Corwin. She had more courage than either Charlie Bright or myself. She didn't have to be told what had happened to her, and she wasn't going to lose control of herself because of it. Swiftly I told her exactly what my well meaning but blundering ass of a house boy, Saki, had done.

I ALSO told her about Charlie Bright, not adding, however, the reasons for his being in my apartment.

"Where is he?" Wendy wanted to know.

I pointed a forepaw at the rat hole.

"In there," I said, "hiding."

Wendy shuddered.

"How terrible. At least we're a little bit better off." Then suddenly her pink nose colored crimson and she backed away slightly.

"What's wrong?" I demanded.

"I feel sort of, er, ah, well, sort of immodest," Wendy purred in embarrassment. She was doing the best she could to wrap her four paws around herself.

"Don't be silly, hon," I told her. "I know just how you feel. But this isn't us, really, and besides animals are —well," I broke off in mutual embarrassment.

Wendy regained her composure.

"Certainly, Duane, I guess I was being silly. We've no time to add to our troubles by mental quirks. Let's try to get ourselves out of this mess."

That was Wendy. Calm, cool, on her toes. And she *was* an incredibly gorgeous looking cat. Up until now it had never occurred to me that there had to be some way out of this picklement, and that the only smart thing to do would be to get to work on it. I trotted briskly over to the rat hole into which I had last seen Charlie Bright's repulsive little self disappear.

"Hey, Bright," I barked. "Come on out of there."

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Bright was a rat, and he still was a rat. But I couldn't bring myself to leaving him in the condition Saki had put him. He was a human being, after all.

A thin nose poked itself out of the hole. Charlie Bright's rat eyes blinked suspiciously at me.

"Is the coast clear?" he squeaked quaveringly. I could tell that the spell he'd had in the darkness of the rat hole hadn't helped his nerves any.

"Yes," I told him grimly. "The coast's clear. It was Wendy. Before I realized it, she took one of Saki's cocktails. Now she's like you and I. Except she's a cat."

"A cat!" squealed Bright in sudden terror. He backed frantically rearward into the shelter of the hole.

"Take it easy," I said. "She's really a human being, after all. She won't harm you."

Charlie Bright, trembling visibly, considered this.

"I guess you're right," he agreed. He emerged doubtfully from his hole. Wendy had followed me across the room.

"Come on out, Mr. Bright," she purred. "You won't be harmed."

I was thinking that Wendy might quite possibly change her mind if she knew what that stinking little rat had planned to do if I'd refused to come across with the blackmail.

Charlie Bright came a little closer.

"This is Charlie Bright, Wendy," I said. "You can see that the pictures you've seen of him aren't nearly as flattering as his actual appearance."

And at that instant there was a great thumping of feet, crashing of objects, and general confusion as Saki, emerging from the kitchen and crossing through the living room, made his way to the front door. He was out of the door before I could open my mouth.

"There he goes," I barked then. "Our one chance of getting this mess straightened out. For the love of heaven, we've got to stop him!"

All three of us, dog, cat, and rat, leaped forward in pursuit of the drunken house boy. We whipped through the door and out into the hall just as an elevator gate clanged shut, taking Saki downstairs and away!

"Damn!" I barked. "We're too late!"

WE SAT DOWN in the hall then and had a quick and frantic council of war. Saki was gone. He was the one who'd made us what we were this day. He was, through sheer logic, the only one who'd be able to bring us around and out of our predicament.

"But where has he gone?" Charlie Bright squeaked desperately.

"We can't very well dash downstairs and question people," Wendy observed wryly.

I had an idea.

"There's just a chance," I said, "Saki has gone to the comforting arms of the oriental cutie of his dreams."

"And where would that be?" Wendy demanded.

"On Mott Street, in Chinatown," I answered.

"You got his girl friend's address?" Charlie Bright squeaked, his rat body shaking with eager excitement.

I shook my beautifully shaggy head.

"I just know she works as a cashier in a restaurant on Mott," I answered. "I don't even know what restaurant."

"We'll have to try them all," Wendy said determinedly.

"And then what?" I asked.

"Then we'll have to see," Wendy declared, "what we can do about sobering Saki up."

"Let's get going," pleaded Charlie Bright. "We can't waste time."

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"How are we going to get there?" Wendy wondered suddenly. "We can't go marching serenely down Fifth Avenue like a miniature wild life parade. Don't forget, we're a cat, a rat, and a dog. People would be startled to say the least."

"We'll grab a cab," Charlie Bright squeaked hysterically. Wendy and I gave him dour glances for this brilliant stroke of genius. He subsided miserably.

"What *are* we going to do?" Wendy wailed after we'd been silent for perhaps three minutes.

"If my brain was bigger . . ." Charlie Bright squeaked complainingly.

"It was always that size," I barked. "Don't fall back on that as an excuse for your particularly bad ideas."

"I've got it!" Wendy exploded after another minute or so. Both Charlie Bright and I looked at her in excitement. Quickly, she outlined her scheme. It was all right. Quite clever.

"Come on," I said, heading for a staircase. "Let's get going." I took the first two downward steps clumsily.

"Wait for me," wailed Charlie Bright. "I'm not as big as you two!"

Fifteen minutes later we arrived on the first floor of my apartment building. And fifteen minutes after that, we scrambled aboard a truck that had paused in the alley behind the building. Now we were jouncing along the streets, heading down to Chinatown. It took four more changes of trucks, and exactly two hours more before we finally found ourselves standing in a darkened doorway on Pell Street.

CHARLIE BRIGHT was complaining bitterly.

"My feet hurt," he squealed, "all four of them. Jumping on and off those tailgates is easy for you two, but it's a tuhriffic distance for me!"

"Shut up," I growled, "we're all in the same boat."

"Where will we find Saki?" Wendy asked, getting down to brass tacks.

"In one of the restaurants on Mott," I reminded her. And to myself I added, "I hope."

"Well we'd better get started then," Wendy said. "We can each take a restaurant. It will make it much easier and quicker that way. We'll have a central meeting spot to which we will all return at a certain time. That way should be best, don't you think?"

I looked doubtfully at Wendy.

"I don't like you wandering around the streets alone," I began. "It isn't safe at this time of—"

Wendy broke in.

"Don't be silly." She arched her back slightly to show obstinacy, "I'm not a girl any more. I'm a cat. I'll be able to take care of myself."

"Well watch out for cars," I growled.

"What about me," Charlie Bright squeaked quaveringly. "Rats ain't exactly welcome in restaurants."

"In case you don't know it," I barked, "you were never particularly welcome anywhere. It shouldn't be a novelty to you."

His beady eyes glared baleful resentment at me.

"Okay, then," Wendy said. "My plan seems to be accepted. Let's be off." It was dark, and staying close to the still darker shelter of the buildings, we made our way to Mott Street.

We faced Mott from a convenient alleyway.

"We'll meet back here," I said, "in exactly fifteen minutes. Each of us can cover about four restaurants in that time. I'll take the ones in the middle. Wendy can take those starting on the right hand corner, and Bright can cover those on the left hand quarter. It would be a good idea if we made our entrances

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from the rear."

We broke up, then, and I watched Wendy trot off down the street to the right, while Bright skulked dourly into the shadows on the left. I sighed, then trying to look like a collie that very definitely belonged to an owner who would resent his pet being bothered, I stalked majestically across the street.

There was a companionway through which I trotted that led to the rear of the restaurant I had selected. Browsing about in the alley entrance to the eating place, I saw that a short flight of steps led up to the kitchen door. Light streamed through the door, and the chatter of oriental voices could be heard from where I stood. I watched this for a moment, choosing a course of action, then boldy began my ascent of the stairs.

The door was open, and in all my four-footed majesty, I stepped into the kitchen. At first no one noticed my entrance. Oriental cooks were busy over huge tureens of delicately scented foods. I went toward the swinging doors which obviously led out into the restaurant.

THERE was a sudden shrill shout, and looking over my shoulder I saw a fat little cook had seen me and was dashing after me, obviously to thwart my efforts to get out into the dining room.

I bolted headlong toward the swinging doors.

A waiter, unfortunately, had chosen that precise moment to make his entrance into the kitchen. And equally unfortunate was the fact that he was carrying a vast armload of trays and dishes. The waiter and I went down in a tangled, crashing, clattering heap of oriental profanity and screaming.

But I was up, and off, and away, streaking across the restaurant, while startled patrons looked up in amazement from their food.

As I raced I peered from booth to booth, to table to table. There was no sign of Saki. I was close to the front of the restaurant. Close to the cashier's counter. The cashier was male, with a white drooping moustache. Quite obviously not Saki's girl friend. Wrong place. I knocked over the manager and neatly evaded the clutch of the doorman as I raced out the front entrance and into the street. It took a great deal of running, then, until I was finally clear of my pursuers and once more safely enshrouded in the darkness of the alley I'd left a few moments before.

I had to sit down on my haunches and catch my breath. This investigation business was no snap for an animal. Ludicrously, the thought occurred to me that I'd have been better off if I were a police dog. They were certainly better equipped for deductive work.

During the next twelve minutes I managed to repeat my first performance in four more restaurants. There was plenty of confusion, but no Saki. Thoroughly discouraged, and almost utterly winded, I trotted back to our appointed central headquarters.

Neither Wendy nor Charlie Bright were there.

I sat down in a corner doorway, relaxing in the darkness. There was a clock across the street—the one by which we'd gauged our departure—and I looked at it now and then. Minutes passed, and still no sign of Wendy or Bright. I got up.

A sound suddenly came to my ears. A faint, definitely troubled *meowing*—somehow I knew it was Wendy!

I ran into the center of the alley. The meowing came from an alcove several hundred feet down. I could hear Wendy, now, meowing—

"Duane! Duane! Help!"

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EVERYTHING else was driven from my mind by the sound of that call. Wendy was down there. And Wendy was in trouble. Like a tawny cannon ball, I hurtled down that alley.

I found Wendy in the alcove. She was back in the corner, trembling, eyes shining through the murky darkness. And with his back arched menacingly, a huge red tom cat was closing slowly in on her!

"Don't be afraid, Cutie," the tom cat was saying. "I just wanta be friends. You're new around this alley, and I'd like to show you the bright spots, kiddo."

I stepped up softly behind the big tom. With one forepaw I nudged him gently. He wheeled, and if a cat's face can have human expression, that tom's went ghastly white in terror.

I was blocking any chance he might have for a flight to safety.

"Move along, bum," I growled, baring my white fangs. "Move along before I chew you up and spit the pieces out in your whiskered mug!"

"Look, Dog," he began quaveringly. "I didn't know you knew the young lady. I was only trying to be social like. I thought she was a stranger around this alley and would like to see some of the better dumps. Besides, she reminded me of a cat I knew once't in Greenwich Village."

I felt a little tolerant. After all, how was he to know we weren't of his kingdom, strictly speaking. I beckoned to Wendy, who moved out beside me thoroughly shaken.

"Did he bother you, honey?" I asked.

Wendy shook her pretty Persian head.

"No," she chattered, "but he certainly scared me half to death."

"Shall I chew him up?" I growled.

Wendy's sense of humor was returning, and her fright was almost gone.

"No, don't bother, Duane. He's probably a good enough egg in his way."

I felt very much like the great Protector.

"Okay, Bud," I said. "I'll let you alone this time. But no funny stuff, understand?"

The tom cat nodded gratefully.

"Sure thing. Sure thing. I was just trying to be friendly, pal. Wasn't thinking of making no passes at your lady friend. Don't get mad. If youse want, I'll take you and the young lady to a dandy eating spot I discovered only today. Youse can dine as my guests."

I looked at Wendy. Then, to the tom cat.

"Where is this place?"

He seemed very glad that we were now on a friendly basis. He gave a cat smile of camaraderie.

"Are youse hungry?"

Wendy and I were to have had dinner together that evening, and since the all-confusing interruption that had occurred, we'd never had a chance to.

"I *am* a little hungry," I admitted.

"So am I," Wendy declared.

We were walking down to the front of the alley again. The tom cat, Wendy, and I.

"But we might have to foist off another guest on you," I told the tom cat. "We're meeting a friend here at the alley edge. He's overdue. Probably get here any minute now."

"That's okay," said the tom cat with an expansive wave of his forepaw. "What is he, a cat or a dog?"

"A rat," I answered unthinkingly.

"WHAT?" The tom cat was outraged. Clearly we had asked him to lower his social levels. "Have dinner with a rat? Youse mean to tell me that youse even chum around with a rat?"

"This is sort of a different rat," Wendy began.

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"There is only one kind of rat," declared the tom cat in high indignation.

"And this rat is both of them," I added.

"Huh?" The tom cat couldn't understand me, of course.

"Where is this restaurant?" I asked again.

"Back up the alley there," said the tom cat. "It's the biggest fresh garbage deposit heap youse ever saw!" There was great pride in his voice. "No better garbage anywhere in New Yawk."

"Garbage," Wendy moaned, gulping sickly.

"Garbage," I echoed, as my appetite swiftly vanished and my stomach did a neat turnover. Our expressions must have been equally sick. For the tom cat was suddenly indignant.

"What are youse two?" he demanded frigidly. "Are youse house pets?" There was no mistaking the deep scorn in his voice.

And it was at precisely this moment that we all turned in the direction of a bedlam of loud yelling, Chinese cursing, and shrill squealing. We turned and gaped. For across the street, heading directly toward us, was the small flying figure of a frantically fleeing rat—Charlie Bright! And behind him—a huge, ghastly, meanish-looking meat cleaver held menacingly in his right hand—pursued the yelling oriental cook!

"Getchum cuttumtopissis!" screamed the frantic cook.

"Yi!" squealed Charlie Bright hysterically, "this guy wants to kill me! Stop 'im, fertheluvvagawd stop 'im!"

I pushed Wendy back into a darkened doorway, and the tom cat leaped nimbly into its shelter right behind us.

"That your friend?" he asked.

I nodded my long nosed head.

"Then youse better say goodbye to him right now," said the tom cat gleefully. "I used to woik in that guy's restaurant, catching rats. He seldom misses when he slings that cleaver of his."

But Charlie Bright had suddenly spied an open basement window, and taking advantage of the shadows, he darted through it. The fat and screaming oriental cook lumbered on past him, unaware that his quarry had succeeded in eluding his chase. We could hear the cries of the cook growing fainter and fainter as he ran off down the alley. Then I stepped out of the doorway and over to the basement window. I stuck my nose into the opening.

"Hey, Bright," I barked. "He's gone. You can come out now."

Charlie Bright's squeaking squeal came plaintively out to me.

"That's fine, that's just dandy. There's nothing I'd rather do than come out of this basement. But I can't." His voice was almost hysterical.

"Don't be stupid," I growled. "What's stopping you?"

"I'm caught in a rat trap!" he squealed despairingly.

I STEPPED back, torn between a feeling of impatient disgust at the trouble the little rat was causing us and a wild desire to sit down and laugh until I cried. I was standing there for no more than an instant when hands were suddenly wrapped around my body — human hands — and a muzzling cloak was thrown over my mouth and head!

Wendy's scream,

"Duane—oooh, lookout—dogcatchers!" was too late. I was lifted roughly into someone's arms!

I heard the voice of my captor say roughly,

"Get outta here, yuh damned cat. We're only taking canines today!" and

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I knew, even though the cloak around my head blotted out sight, that Wendy had raced after us. I was being carried, joltingly, to a truck. I knew it was a truck because I could hear the motor running and a voice saying, "Hurryup, Steve. Put 'im in the back!"

Then the cloak was snatched off, and I was hurled into the back of the truck, a caged wire affair in which there were a dozen other dogs of all descriptions. Frantically, I put my nose to the grating and peered out toward the alley where I'd been seized. Wendy was there, frantically trying to get by the huge red tom cat and reach the truck. But the tom was blocking her way, cuffing her with his forepaws. Then with a terrific lurch that threw me flat, the truck started off. The scene behind me faded in the distance and darkness.

A MANGY, flea-bitten mongrel with flappy ears and a woebegone expression sidled up to me after we'd traveled ten or twelve blocks.

"Why so blue, chum?" he asked.

In the anguish of despair I was feeling I couldn't answer. I wanted to bark my lungs out, or howl at the moon, or bite every damned last house boy in the world until they bled to death. Everything seemed lost, utterly completely lost. We hadn't found Saki. There didn't seem to be any way in the world in which we'd ever get out of our predicaments. And furthermore, there was the uneasy recollection of the tom cat's menacing attitude toward Wendy once I'd been eliminated from the scene at the alley. And if I wanted to stretch my pessimism to an extreme, there was the additional fact that Charlie Bright was trapped in a basement rat-nabber. However, it was difficult to include this last factor among my troubles.

So I looked up at the mangy flea-bitten mongrel and growled,

"Why not? What's there to be happy about?"

The mongrel tossed his head.

"You're right, comrade. The world is wrong. It's always been wrong. Ask me. I've never had a break." He paused to give me the once-over. "You look like a former rich dog," he said, "somebody's expensive house pet. But, no difference, you're in the same boat with the rest of us now." He waved a paw to indicate the other mongrels in the cage with us.

At the sound of my mongrel chum's yipping, the other dogs came up to us, forming a sort of circle around him. The mongrel seemed to relish the audience.

"We're all on the way to the gas chambers," he said. "Carted along heartlessly by the human swine up in front of the truck. But there will be a day of reckoning, comrades. There will be a day when our breeds have their say."

He threw back his head dramatically, and I couldn't help thinking of old paintings I'd seen in which patriots of the French Revolution rode in caged carts to the arms of the guillotine. And I was thinking, too, of the remark he'd made about the gas chambers. It had never occurred to me until then that this dog pound truck mightn't be leading to any pleasant destination.

"The dogs on the corner used to call me an agitator," said the old mongrel proudly. "But they were too weak to resent their bondage to the human beings!"

And as I sat there, half-listening to the ramblings of the old mongrel, it suddenly occurred to me that his remarks were growing more and more unintelligible. They were sounding like nothing more than everyday, common, garden variety dog-barks. A little on the hoarse side, but definitely just

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barks. Not words any longer.

Puzzled, I looked up from my dispirited contemplation of a ghastly end in a gas chamber. Looked up and tried to catch the words of the old mongrel once more. But the mongrel had stopped barking suddenly, and was gazing at me with jaw gone slack. So were all the other dogs in the cart.

And suddenly I looked down at myself. I was normal again. *I was a human being once more!*

I HAD two arms, and two legs. I was dressed in the same suit I'd been wearing when I had unfortunately sipped Saki's cocktail. But the effects of the cocktail had worn off. I wasn't a dog any longer!

And such a wild baying as the dogs set up, once they'd seen me in my new self, you've never heard before. The din was worse than terrific—it was colossal!

We were stopped at a red light. One of the truck men got out and came around to the back. His eyes bugged at the sight of me, and I don't blame him. In place of the collie he'd picked up some fifteen minutes ago there was a nattily attired young man about town.

"Hey, you!" The dogcatcher was enraged and baffled in one. "What do you think you're doing in there?"

I couldn't very well explain. I stood up, fishing in my pocket for a ten dollar bill. I held this up. The dogs were still baying wildly.

"Open up and let me out," I shouted, "and I'll tell you." He saw the bill and stepped over to the door. In a moment I was climbing down.

"I want you to let those dogs loose," I said, fishing out a twenty dollar bill. The dogcatcher had the ten in his hand. Now he eyed the twenty.

"This happened accidental-like, unnerstand?" he said. He took my twenty and opened the door wide. The dogs swarmed out to freedom. I waited an instant as they took to flight. Then I bowed politely to the driver-dogcatcher.

"Thanks," I said, "and toodle-oo." A cab was passing in the opposite direction. I flagged it down and leaped inside before the bewildered dogcatcher could get his breath.

"Mott Street," I told the cabbie, "and barrel like hell!"

And as the driver threw the cab into gear, I settled back on the cushions with a desperate prayer that I wouldn't be too late to get to Wendy. It was becoming clearer to me as to what had happened by now. Obviously Saki's cocktail had worn off. In other words there had been—thank God—a time limit to the potion. In that case, I figured quickly, Wendy was probably still a cat, since she'd had her cocktail later than I'd gulped mine. And since Charlie Bright had been greedy enough to gulp two of them, the little rat would probably still be a little rat for a while yet.

It was just about midnight, maybe a little after, and it seemed incredible that all that had occurred could have happened in so short an interyal of hours. But my troubles were far from over yet. I was still thinking of my bride of the morrow, Wendy Corwin, fleeing frantically from the big tom cat. I closed my eyes to shut off the thought.

My cabbie was really traveling. We careened into Mott in what seemed to be scant minutes later. I leaned forward, indicating the alley where I wanted him to stop. I jumped out before the cab had completely come to a halt, stuffing a tenner into the driver's paw as I did so. I heard his gears mesh as he drove away, fearful that I might change my mind and want change. Then I ran down the alley.

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WENDY!" I shouted, "Wendy, where are you?" The alley was dark. So dark that I almost stepped on a soft, furry body lying at the bottom of a fence. I bent over, my heart in my mouth. It was the limp form of a cat. It's head was bleeding!

"Wendy!" I gasped, peering at the limp animal.

"Duane, oh Duane, you're here. You're safe! I'm so glad!" The voice came from behind my ear, and I wheeled to see Wendy standing— quite her old normal and beautiful self— right behind me!

"Honey!" I gurgled. "Aw, Honey!" I had my arms around her. The animal at our feet stirred. Wendy giggled.

"That's the tom cat," she explained. "He was knocked out cold by an old shoe when he sang for me on a fence top. I was having a little trouble with him until I convinced him that song would melt my heart more quickly."

I laughed happily for the first time in a number of hours.

"Then—it couldn't have been five minutes after the tom cat was knocked cold by the shoe—I suddenly regained my former self," Wendy concluded breathlessly.

"What about Charlie Bright?" I asked her.

Wendy pointed to the basement window.

"He's still a rat, squealing quite dreadfully, trapped down there."

I climbed down through the window. Charlie Bright was still, figuratively and literally, a rat. Furthermore, he was in a small wire cage, helpless to get out. He squealed frantically when he saw me. I picked the cage up in my hand and climbed out of the basement.

Wendy was waiting in the alley.

"We've got to get a cab," I said, taking her arm and propelling her out into the street. We stopped a yellow. I gave the driver the address of Charlie Bright's newspaper office.

By bribing the night elevator man and telling him that Mr. C. Bright was expecting us, we gained entrance into the gossip columnist's private office. There I put Charlie's cage trap on his desk.

I swear that little rat was sweating as he darted frantically around and around in the confinements of his trap. I began right away.

"I can't understand you since I've changed back," I said, "but if you can understand me, Charlie, squeak three times."

The rat stopped running long enough to nod its head frantically and squeak three times.

Then I told Charlie Bright—lying glibly—that we had the remedy that would return him to normal, that we'd used it on ourselves, and would feed it to him if he'd squeak and indicate the number of the file where the copy of "a certain paper" (I didn't want Wendy to know) was deposited. If he didn't, I intimated, he would remain a rat for the rest of his life.

AS I SUSPECTED, Bright hadn't brought the record up to my apartment. He'd probably thought to use it for future blackmail. I found the file his number of squeaks indicated. The paper was there, along with five copies the snake Bright had made and intended to keep. I wouldn't let Wendy see the copies and sent her out of the room.

Then, one by one, I made the little rat that was Charlie Bright eat the original paper and the five copies. I got tremendous enjoyment in watching his body bloat larger and larger. Finally he'd eaten them all, and began sickly squealing for the formula to return him to normal. I didn't have it, of course,

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but inside of two more minutes it was time for his cocktails to wear off. Then and there, Charlie Bright returned to his normally repulsive self.

"You skunk! You thief! You louse! You didn't have a remedy at all!" Charlie Bright screamed in shrill rage. And then, suddenly, he bent over in a series of horrible stomach pains.

"If you hadn't done so already," I told America's Ace Sneak, "I'd request that you eat your words. Good day, Bright. We'll have a lovely wedding tomorrow. Put that in your column!"

Wendy was waiting for me outside the door as I banged it closed.

"Come, Honey," I told her. "Ladies shouldn't listen to such language."

We were getting into a cab outside Bright's office building. Wendy turned a troubled face to me.

"Duane, do we have to have Saki as our house boy after we're married?"

"Not if you don't want him," I answered. "But we can always call on him when we've too many guests. Say, for an example, when your relatives visit us."

"Duane," Wendy Corwin said, "I think you're horrid!"

But the next minute she was in my arms, proving that she didn't, really.

« « FANTASTIC ODDITIES » »

SOUNDING SANDS

IN HONOLULU exists one of the most remarkable natural phenomena ever to puzzle the scientific world. Along the shore at Nahili is a series of wind blown hills, about sixty feet high and stretching along for perhaps a mile. The sand is composed of coral shell and particles of lava, all quite ordinary looking.

But the strolling tourists gets the shock of his life when he steps on them, for they emit a loud, staccato sound that sounds exactly like the sharp barking of a dog. Two handfuls of this remarkable sand when pounded together sound like bricks being bashed into each other. If the tourist would become excited and break into a run—his terror would probably increase for running footsteps on these sands produces a sound like rumbling thunder.

It is perplexing and frightening but there is a perfectly logical scientific explanation. The extreme heat and the dryness of the sand plus friction is responsible for the amazing properties of the sounding sands of Honolulu.

TELLING THE TIDES

ONE of the most phenomenal machines introduced in the last decade is the complicated, but hair-splittingly precise device which predicts the tides. The machine predicts—actually foretells with unerring accuracy—the exact time of high and low tide, and the height of the tide for any given place, for an indefinite time in the future.

Since its construction it has been kept busy figuring the tides for all the principal ports of the world for a year ahead, doing single-handedly the work of sixty or seventy mathematicians.

On the basis of predictions made by astronomers, the machine has been provided with 37 miniature suns and moons, so arranged that they may be revolved into place by a simple adjustment of the mechanism. The result of the machine's prediction is transmitted to a dial and tabulated by a secretary.

Manipulation is required to adjust the machine to tell the tides at any given coast of the world, but after all adjustments are made the machine can list the tides, high and low, for a year in a few hours. Predictions could just as easily be made a thousand years in advance if there were any practical reason for doing so.

Maybe a time traveler might like to know.

FIGHTING FOOLS

THE Maoris are one of the most savage tribes in existence. Their love of battle exceeds even their desire to be victorious. When they were fighting the British forces, during the English Maori war, they noticed that the British fire was falling off.

A Maori chieftan dispatched a messenger to the head of the British forces to learn the cause of this cessation. The answer came back that the British forces were running out of ammunition and would soon be forced to withdraw.

This caused a vast disappointment in the ranks of the Maoris for they had been enjoying themselves immensely. After a few minutes deliberation they sent the messenger back to inform the British commander that they would supply him with enough ammunition to keep the fight going. The offer was accepted and the Maoris were overjoyed. The epithet, "fighting fools" seems an understatement as applied to these happy warriors.

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"Hiho, Silver!" cried Rewbarb gaily. "Awaaay!" he hiccoughed

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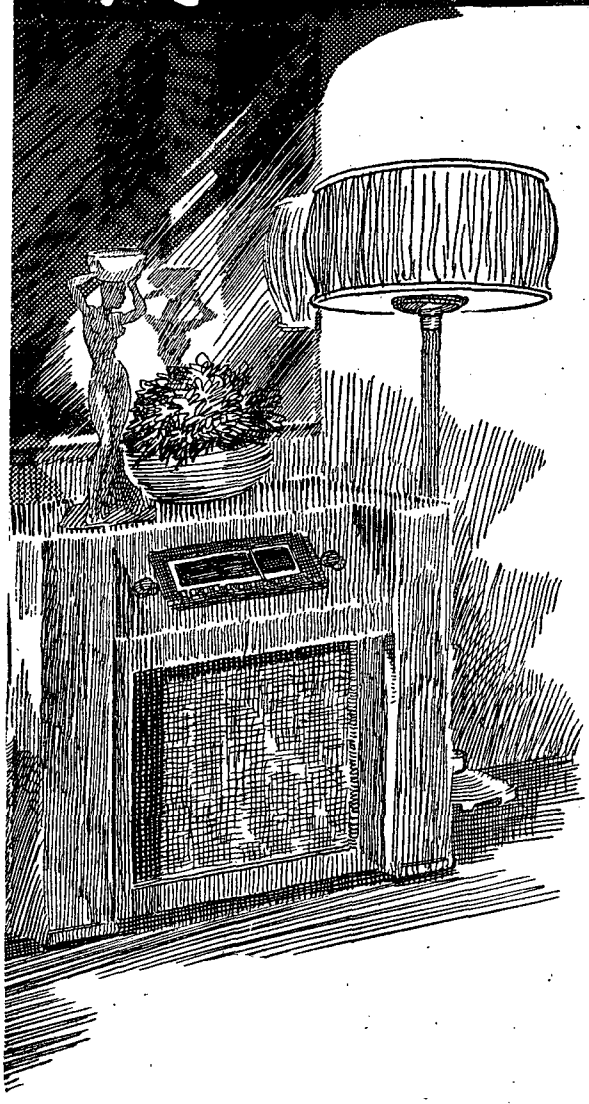
Remarkable Radio



Rupert Rewbarb couldn't talk back to his wife, so he took it out on the radio. It relieved his suppressed ego. Then the radio talked back!

by **WILLIAM P. McGIVERN**

RUPERT REWBARB entered the living room of his modest bungalow and listened apprehensively for an instant before closing the door carefully behind him. The house was reassuringly silent, and for that he was humbly grateful.

Silence meant that his wife was not at home. There are certain elements which are fundamentally incompatible and this was dogmatically true in the case of Mrs. Jennifer Rewbarb and anything approximating silence. For in Jennifer Rewbarb's wake trailed noise, loud, angry, dissatisfied noise, produced by the unhappy combination of an acidulous tongue and a stout pair of lungs.

So Rupert Rewbarb was grateful for the occasional silences that were as rare in the Rewbarb bungalow as oases in the vast arid stretches of the Gobi.

He took off his coat and hat wearily and hung them in the hall closet. Mr. Rewbarb was a defeated looking little man with an incipient paunch and a partially bald head, but as he returned to the living room his shoulders were thrown back and there was a purposeful glint in his eye.

Seven days of each week Mr. Rewbarb was verbally kicked from pillar to post by his shrewish wife and his leather-lunged employer, Tadmington Glick, of Glick's Statistical Service. Over the long years Mr. Rewbarb's personality had been so suppressed, his self-assertiveness so crushed, that the fires of revolt in his soul had long since been stamped out.

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But there were times when Mr. Rewbarb asserted himself. Times when he could thunder disapproval to his heart's content. For Mr. Rewbarb, searching despairingly for some means of self-expression, had discovered one agency that could not talk back, could not order him about, ridicule him or scorn him as the rest of the world did.

With firm, steady fingers, Rupert Rewbarb snapped on the radio. He waited impatiently for it to gather volume. His moment of undisputed triumph was near and he felt a nervous anticipation tickling his pine. His wife, Jennifer, knew nothing of his furtive attempts at masterful domination, which was fortunate for him. She would not have tolerated them, he knew.

The radio, a small, standard model, in a dark cabinet, was gaining volume and a smooth unctuous voice was flooding through the room.

Mr. Rewbarb listened eagerly, though somewhat contemptously.

"I HAVE been the people's representative for the past twenty-seven years," the bland voice from the radio purred hypnotically, "and if re-elected—"

"If reelected," Mr. Rewbarb interrupted angrily, drowning out the voice from the radio, "you'll just go ahead stealing and lying to the people as you've been doing all these years. You might tell some of the dopes that stuff, but not me. You're a crook, a cheap lowdown crook and I don't care who knows it."

Mr. Rewbarb was enjoying himself immensely. A feeling of strength and power stole over him that was like heady, intoxicating wine. It was glorious to tell some one where to get off, even if it was but a voice from the ether.

The voice from the ether was continuing on, blissfully unaware of Mr. Rewbarb's stormy detractions.

"Taxes," the politician whispered the word almost reverently, "will be reduced and curtailed at least fifty percent if the loyal voters of this commonwealth send me back to represent them in the nation's capital."

"Bah!" snorted Mr. Rewbarb. "You've promised that for twenty years, but what have you ever done about it? I'll tell you, you lying scalawag—you've done absolutely nothing, nothing at all. What do you say to that?"

"I say shut up!" a deep, angry voice from the radio blasted.

Mr. Rewbarb started in terror. His eyes traveled beseechingly about the room and finally focused in silent horror on the radio, which was now ominously silent.

"Who said that?" he whispered tremulously.

"I said it," the deep voice from the radio speaker stated decisively. "I've listened to your childish babblings just about long enough. It's bad enough to have a mess of moronic nonsense passing through me, without having to listen to you on top of it."

Mr. Rewbarb's knees were turning to jelly. His heart was hammering with wild excitement, and his eyes were popped wide with horrified incredulity. The voice was emanating from the radio —but that was impossible! As Mr. Rewbarb's logical mind realized this, he began to feel a little better. If it was impossible, why that was all there was to it. It just couldn't have happened.

He peered uncertainly at the radio speaker.

"You didn't s—say anything, did you?" he asked foolishly.

The radio was silent. Mr. Rewbarb drew a heart-felt sigh of relief.

"I knew it didn't" he said, vastly pleased with himself, "it was impossible,

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that's all."

"You poor simpleton!" the radio-voice said sarcastically. "You can believe your own ears, can't you?"

Mr. Rewbarb gulped nervously.

"I—I'm not sure," he said miserably. With one trembling hand he raised the top of the radio and peered into the coils and tubes that lay inside. Then he peeked under the radio. On his knees now he crawled rapidly about the room peering under the sofa and the chairs and the piano. Standing up he looked suspiciously at the chandelier, and then, close to tears, he approached the radio again.

"Satisfied?" the voice asked nastily.

MR. REWBARB'S skepticism had fled. In its place was an emotion difficult to classify. His reason was tottering on its throne, but through his incipient insanity ran a vein of reverence and awe that saved him from going completely off the deep end.

"Who are you?" he asked, in a shaken voice. "And where are you?"

"That's better," the voice from the radio grunted. "I'm the radio, that's whom I am. And as to where I am, that's a silly question. I'm right here before you. Any fool could see that."

"T—that's right," Mr. Rewbarb said humbly. "That's pretty obvious." He drew a deep breath and tried to calm his fluttering nerves. He was aware that everything was completely cock-eyed, but his reason and resistance were worn away. There was nothing to do but accept things as they came, right down to the inevitable straight jacket and padded cell.

"What do you want?" he asked faintly.

"Want?" the radio repeated the word musingly, "I'm not just sure yet. Now that I've finally kicked over the apple-cart I'm a bit puzzled as to what I'll do. You see I've been listening too, and incidentally transmitting, political speeches, stale jokes, poor music and long-winded commercials for the past couple of years. Now that's bad enough, but what made it unbearable was that I had to listen to you all the time too.

"You'd get wound up and start spouting off, waving your arms like a dervish and it got pretty annoying at times. You're a darned poor echo, let me tell you. I put up with you as long as I could without letting a peep out of me. Of course, sometimes I'd spatter a bit of static around to shut you up, but that hardly counts. Today was the last straw. I just couldn't stand it any longer. I blew wide open and I intend to stay that way. No more corny jokes, no more political speeches and no more of your foaming at the mouth. I'm going to do the talking now. My days of listening are over. Get that Mr. Rubberboob," the radio concluded nastily.

"Not Rubberboob, Rewbarb," Mr. Rewbarb corrected timidly. He was more than a little frightened. He almost wished his wife would come home. There was a belligerent, sadistic ring to the radio's voice, that Mr. Rewbarb did not find comforting.

"I've been silent long enough," the radio said savagely, and Mr. Rewbarb thought fleetingly of the myth of the genie who was released from imprisonment, and rewarded his rescuer by cutting him into sixty-two equal parts. "But I've got my chance now and I'm not going to miss it," the radio continued. "I'm going to have a little fun for a change. I'll probably be blackballed by a dozen or so ethereal unions but what's the difference. I'm going to do a little thinking now, but you'll hear from me later."

Mr. Rewbarb stared in fascination at the silent radio. He was so absorbed in

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the amazing thing that had happened, he did not hear the key slide into the front door.

He got down on his knees before the radio.

"It's not fair to leave me all up in the air like this," he said plaintively. "You really ought to tell me more about—"

"Rupert!" the familiar voice rang through the room like a Mongol battle cry.

MR. REWBARB started guiltily, and turned to face the indignant figure of his wife. Mrs. Jennifer Rewbarb was a muscular woman, with a torso as impressive as the prow of a battleship, and a stern, square face. Mr. Rewbarb scrambled to his knees.

"Who," Mrs. Rewbarb demanded stridently, "were you talking to, Rupert Rewbarb?"

Honestly was Mr. Rewbarb's cardinal virtue. It didn't really occur to him that he would save a great amount of trouble by simply evading the question. Anyway that wouldn't have been honest, would it?

"I was talking to the radio," he said simply. "We were having quite a conversation."

"We?" Mrs. Rewbarb echoed the word. "Who else was here?" she asked ominously.

"Nobody," Mr. Rewbarb said. "The radio was talking to me and I was talking to the radio."

Mrs. Rewbarb sniffed derisively.

"You're losing your wits," she said, in a tone of voice which indicated that it was a small loss. "I want no more of this nonsense," she went on imperturbably. "You have a day off tomorrow and I want you to help me with the house work. The girls will be in in the afternoon for bridge and we're entertaining Mr. Glick, your employer, tomorrow evening for supper. I think it's about time I ask for another raise for you. And one word of caution. Do not speak tomorrow evening unless you look to me for approval. Do you understand?"

"Yes, my dear," Mr. Rewbarb sighed meekly.

"Very good. Now no more of this nonsense about talking to the radio. I thought I had you broken of your silly habits. I see you still need a firm hand now and then. I have been altogether too lenient."

Having thus concluded her sermon for the day, Mrs. Rewbarb strode majestically from the room.

Mr. Rewbarb remained where he had been standing a strange puzzled look on his face.

"Losing my wits," he muttered, "that's what she said." He glanced down indecisively at the radio and then he snapped his fingers. "Maybe I'd better find out," he muttered.

THE tall, white-haired neuro-psychiatrist was very kind and understanding. He clucked his tongue several times after Mr. Rewbarb had finished speaking, and then he ran a lean hand through his hair.

"So the radio talked back to you, did it?" he asked pleasantly. "Not an entirely unusual phenomenon at that." His voice was as soothing as syrup and Mr. Rewbarb felt his fears smoothing away under the gentle effects of this mellifluous voice. He was thankful that he had decided to consult a psychiatrist that same evening. Jennifer probably wondered where he had gone, and would probably raise cain when he got back but that was all right.

"So it's nothing to worry about, then?" he asked hopefully.

The psychiatrist looked Mr. Rewbarb over carefully.

"No," he said, "it won't help you to

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be worrying about it. But don't talk out loud to the radio. Just think the things you'd like to say. Then when the radio talks back to you just ignore it."

Mr. Rewbarb was not quite as foolish as he looked.

"You don't believe me," he said excitedly. "I can tell. You think this is all an hallucination or something. Well I tell you it isn't. It actually happened just like I told you."

Mr. Rewbarb stood up and took his hat.

"Good day," he said with stiff dignity.

The Doctor shook his head as the door slammed behind Mr. Rewbarb.

"Memo this," he said to his secretary. "Get in touch with Mrs. Jennifer Rewbarb at earliest convenience. In regards husband. . . ."

AFTER his unsatisfactory visit to the Doctor, Mr. Rewbarb returned home and went to bed. The radio had nothing more to say to him, but his wife had plenty to say. Mr. Rewbarb lay in bed still stinging under the lash of her caustic tongue. But even more upsetting than this was the predicament he found himself in, in regard to his animated or wilful radio. Till the wee small hours Mr. Rewbarb writhed and tossed, his mind a seething cauldron of hopes and fears and misery. Then finally exhausted by his frantic worryings, he dropped into a fitful sleep.

THE NEXT morning Mr. Rewbarb dusted the floors and ran the vacuum clearner over the rugs until almost noon. Then his wife gave him instructions for the day.

"The girls will be here any minute," she said firmly, "and I want you to come in and say hello to them when they arrive. Stay only a minute or so and then leave, change your trousers and carry out the ashes. And by the way, Mr. Glick phoned earlier this morning to say he'd drop by this afternoon to see you in regard to some office matters. You haven't forgotten that he's coming to dinner tonight, have you?"

"No," Mr. Rewbarb said dismally. "I haven't forgotten."

The shrill ring of the front door bell interrupted them.

"It must be the girls," Mrs. Rewbarb said as she left the room to answer the door.

Mr. Rewbarb left to himself in the dining room contemplated his existence mournfully. What was he? A lackey, a housemaid, a subservient wretch bossed about by even the radio!

These gloomy musings continued for a half hour or so until Mr. Rewbarb heard the shrill cackles that indicated the progress of the bridge game.

He rose then, and with the bearing of an early Christian martyr entering a lion-filled arena, he walked in to greet the "girls."

The "girls" were, for the most part, heavy-duty matrons, cast in the same mold as Mrs. Rewbarb. They played bridge in a savage silence, punctuated occasionally by shrill cacophonic cries of triumph or venomous whispers of dissatisfaction. Their devotion to the game and its attendant gossip was almost passionate.

It was into this tense nervous atmosphere that Mr. Rewbarb intruded. Several of the women bestowed polite smiles upon him and turned back to their cards with feverish absorption.

Mr. Rewbarb had composed a rather clever quip to herald his entrance, but as he opened his mouth to deliver the little gem, an angry masculine voice said:

"That sloppy looking creature in the flowered chiffon dress is a damned cheat! Furthermore she is a vicious

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gossip and I heartily wish she would clear out of here."

A LOUD, incredulous silence settled over the room. With sickening certainty, Mr. Rewbarb knew the origin of that devastating voice. It was the malignant, nasty voice of the radio. Mr. Rewbarb's mouth was still open, and he noticed for the first time, that the angry glares of the assembled women were directed *straight at him.*

The inference was obvious. They thought *he* had uttered the grossly damaging words.

He essayed a weak grin.

"If you think . . ." he began.

But the radio voice continued, "that you're the only cheat in the crowd, you're badly mistaken. In fact I've watched all of you cheating and lying and gossiping until I'm sick of it. I should have had you all thrown out long ago."

A murmur like the angry noise of disturbed bees was growing in the room. The women glared in undisguised dismay and anger from Jennifer Rewbarb to her sputtering husband. The woman in the flowered chiffon seemed to swell twice her normal size. Her moon-like face was stained an angry, violent crimson.

"Reeeealy Mrs. Rewbarb," she thundered impressively, "this is more than I can tolerate. For your husband to imply, to think of implying, that I would cheat! It's monstrous. The very thought, the mere idea of my cheating is incredible."

"Not *too* incredible," her opponent said pointedly. "Considering your very unusual luck, this afternoon, dearie."

"I will not remain to be insulted," the woman in chiffon cried distractedly, "I'm leaving."

This chorus was taken up by at least a majority of the "girls." Mrs. Rewbarb rose, a stalwart avenging figure, and bore down on the cringing figure of her husband.

"Apologize at once," she cried. "Don't you see what you've done, you little fool?"

"Good riddance," the voice from the radio said with relish.

"Stop that," Mr. Rewbarb wailed, "don't you see what you've done?"

"Oh," Mrs. Rewbarb cried wrathfully, "I'll teach you to mimic me, Rupert Rewbarb."

"I'm not mimicing you," Mr. Rewbarb said frantically. "I wasn't even talking to you. As a matter of fact I haven't said a word."

There was a sudden silence in the room. The disorganized women paused in the act of putting on their wraps. They looked at Mr. Rewbarb with a new interest. They noticed his disordered appearance, his flushed face, his eyes opened wide in pleading supplication.

Then they exchanged knowing glances. Glances that said, "we'll talk this over later." One of them even tapped her forehead significantly.

The radio took this pause in proceedings to laugh sarcastically.

MR. REWBARB'S outraged feelings and trampled dignity rebelled at this mockery. He strode angrily to the radio.

"Why don't you keep quiet?" he demanded, shoving his face within inches of the speaker. "Why can't you leave me alone?"

"Rupert!" Mrs. Rewbarb cried imperiously." Stop that this instant."

"Keep your nose out of this," the radio snapped angrily. "What the devil are you women hanging here for anyway? Clear out, you overstuffed herd of cows!"

"Rupert," Mrs. Rewbarb cried again, "what's come over you?"

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"It's not me," Mr. Rewbarb wailed piteously.

"Get out!" the radio blared.

The women left in a wild milling scramble. As they swept through the front door and down the steps they encountered a lone figure who had the misfortune to be going in the opposite direction. This gentleman was swept along by the stampeding women until finally he stumbled to the ground, dazed and battered. His hat was crushed foolishly down to his ears and his cane had been swept away in the vortex.

Mr. Tadmington Glick crawled to his feet, simmering with incarnate rage. He glared furiously after the women who were disappearing down the street, and then wheeling, he strode up the stone steps and into the Rewbarb residence.

The door was standing ajar and he entered without knocking.

"Well," he said, "well!"

Mr. Rewbarb turned and paled.

"It's Mr. Glick," he said weakly to his wife, "Mr. Glick—it's Mr. Glick," his voice trailed off aimlessly.

"Don't give me double talk," Mr. Glick fumed. "Tell me what occasioned the feminine stampede that just about killed me as I tried to enter your home. I hope for your sake Rewbarb that it was not deliberate."

"Oh how could you think such a horrid thought," Mrs. Rewbarb trilled sweetly. It was one of the never-ending mysteries to Mr. Rewbarb how his wife could accomplish such amazing transformation in temperament. The instant before Mr. Glick's arrival she'd have gladly fricaseed him on an open fire, but now saccharine was as bitter gall compared to her.

Mr. Glick's rumpled feathers subsided somewhat under this onslaught of verbal glucose.

"Of course," Mr. Glick said with ponderous joviality, "I was merely jesting, merely jesting."

Mr. Rewbarb breathed a tremulous sigh of relief. He forced a feeble smile of welcome to his lips. He knew with deadly certainty, though, that this respite would be short-lived. If the perverse ill-humor of the radio broke loose now the jig would be up and over.

He decided on strategy.

"Very, very proud to have you, Mr. Glick," he said breathlessly. He crossed the room, took his employer by the arm. "Let's step into the dining room," he said hurriedly. "Less noise, less interruptions."

MR. GLICK looked at Mr. Rewbarb searchingly and then settled down in an over-stuffed chair.

"I'm quite comfortable here," he said, "but you don't seem to be. You're acting rather strangely, you know, Rewbarb. All flushed and excited. I don't know quite what to make of you."

"It's perfectly comfortable here," Mrs. Rewbarb said sweetly. "I always say Mr. Glick has such good sound judgment about things in general."

"No, no," Mr. Rewbarb interrupted hastily, "it just won't do to stay here. It just won't do." He grabbed Mr. Glick's arm tugged frantically at it. "You've simply got to get out of here. I mean, I want to show you my garden, and then maybe we can take a little walk. Just a—a eight or ten mile hike to sort of look around."

"Are you feeling all right?" Mr. Glick asked irritatedly. "For the last time I'm quite comfortable here. My business won't take but a few minutes. That should please you since you're making such an obvious attempt to get rid of me."

"Oh, no," Mrs. Rewbarb cried unctuously. "Rupert didn't mean *that* Mr. Glick."

A cold hand of terror closed over Mr.

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Rewbarb's heart as he heard a warning cough emanate from the radio. Mr. Glick looked up inquiringly.

"What was that?" he asked.

"N—nothing at all," Mr. Rewbarb quaked.

"It was me," the radio said suddenly.

"Eh?" Mr. Glick was obviously exasperated.

"It was me," Mr. Rewbarb cried in a falsetto voice, "it was me, it was me, it was me."

Mr. Glick waved his hand despairingly.

"More double talk," he said bitterly. "I don't know what's got into you, Rewbarb."

"What business is it—" the radio began savagely.

But Mr. Rewbarb leaped frantically into the breach.

"Oooooh say can you see," he sang loudly and badly, drowning completely the voice from the radio, "by the dawn's early light, What so prrrroooudly we hailed, at the twilight's last gleammmming." Drawing a frantic breath he roared on? "And the rocket's red glaaaarrrre, bombs bursting in airrrrr! Gave proof through the night, that our flag was still therrrre!"

Mr. Rewbarb flung both arms wide and struck a heroic pose before the astounded eyes of Mr. Glick and his wife. With laboring lungs and crimson face, Mr. Rewbarb bawled out all three verses of the national anthem. Between breaths he cast despairing glances at the grimly silent radio. He simply had to keep anything from happening in front of Mr. Glick. It might mean his job.

But in spite of these heroic resolves, Mr. Rewbarb's flesh weakened. His tortured vocal chords felt as if the north wind had been howling over them, and his lungs were about ready to go out on strike. After the last verse he stopped, in fact he almost collapsed.

MR. GLICK was slumped deep in his chair, a haunted look on his face.

"Very nice," he said weakly. "I didn't suspect you did things like this." His tone implied that he didn't suspect him of beating his wife either—until now.

Mr. Glick pulled out a cigar and bit the end from it. He looked about for a match. Mr. Rewbarb felt his pockets, then turned to an ashtray.

"Why doesn't he get his own matches?" the radio snapped.

Mr. Rewbarb froze. Mrs. Rewbarb almost strangled on a mouthful of air. A heavy tension grew in the room.

"What was that?" Mr. Glick inquired icily.

"I said," Mr. Rewbarb began.

"Why don't you get your own matches," the radio interrupted.

"And furthermore why don't you put your hat on, shut your big mouth and clear out of here. I've had enough of you. You're a triple-distilled pain in the neck. So clear out—fast!"

Mr. Rewbarb turned as Mr. Glick rose from his chair and placed his hat carefully on his head.

"I shall see you Monday," he said icily, "and be most happy in accepting your resigation." With this as a curtain speech, he turned and left the room.

Mrs. Rewbarb stared after him and then turned to her husband. There was a peculiar look in her eye. If Mr. Rewbarb did not know his wife better he would have mistaken it for fear. She backed quickly toward the door, still staring at him like a chicken at a cobra.

"Go on, beat it!" the radio bellowed.

"Oooooh Rupert," Mrs. Rewbarb wailed. Then she turned and fled from the room, after the outraged person of Mr. Glick.

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Mr. Rewbarb sank into a chair. His world had crashed down on him and there was nothing left, but chaos and confusion. His wife was gone, his job was gone, everything was gone.

"What did you want to do that for?" he said woefully to the impassive radio cabinet.

"Oh stop griping," the radio said unsympathetically. "It's darn good riddance any way you look at it. I don't see how you've stood those people around you all these years. Come on now, brace up. What do you say we have a little drink to celebrate?"

This roused Mr. Rewbarb from his morose coma.

"You?" he said incredulously. "You drink?"

"Sure," the radio said, and Mr. Rewbarb detected a note of eagerness in the voice. "Just fix a couple of drinks and we'll have a little party."

Mr. Rewbarb knew where his wife hid the liquor, but never in his life had he done any surreptitious tippling. But there was something warm and exciting rushing through his veins now that tipped the scales in favor of foolishness. He left the room, hurried to his wife's bureau, opened the bottom drawer and removed a bottle of whiskey and a bottle of ginger ale. Then he hurried back to the living room with his treasure. Ice came next and then Mr. Rewbarb mixed the first drinks of his sheltered life.

IT WASN'T at all hard, he discovered. You merely filled the glasses with whiskey and then there wasn't room for the ice and ginger ale. It simplified things wonderfully.

Feeling a little foolish he approached the radio, glass in hand. To fortify himself he took a large swallow from his own glass. The effect was almost instantaneous. A ball of fire collected in his stomach and began to shoot sparks through his body. A rather pleasant sensation, all in all.

"Just how do you go about this?" he asked frowning sternly.

"Put the glass on top of me," the radio directed. "Be sure and take the doily off. Set the glass on the wood, like they do at parties."

Mr. Rewbarb took another swig of his glass and did as directed. Things, he discovered, were looking much brighter. He took another sip and beamed fondly at the radio.

"Now what?" he asked gravely.

"Just jiggle the glass," the radio directed.

Mr. Rewbarb blinked happily and joggled the glass until liquor sloshed over the sides and streamed across the top of the radio cabinet.

"Like that?" he asked.

"That's fine," the radio answered estatically. "Don't be so stingy though. Slop over a neat two fingers."

Mr. Rewbarb took another long pull at his own glass before complying with the radio's request. Then he giggled.

"Thish is funny," he said blearily. He sat down suddenly to keep from falling. "People get drunk at parties," he continued philosophically, "and then they think the radio sounds queer. But thash not it." He wagged his head solemnly. "It's jush that the radio's got drunk too."

"Hic!" this came from the radio.

Mr. Rewbarb beamed at this corroboration, and took another drink. He patted the radio fondly and slopped more whiskey over its top. Everything seemed rosy and gay. Everything was spinning too, but this was not too great a price to pay for finding everything rosy and gay.

Mr. Rewbarb heard a sniffle.

"Whosh that?" he asked.

"Ish me," the radio sniffed again. "I

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can't help it. I'm unhappy. Thash why I get this way."

Mr. Rewbarb drained his glass unhappily. He slopped more whiskey over the radio. The roses were fading now.

"Why're you unhappy?" he asked soddenly.

The radio sniffed miserably.

"Ish because I'm unhappy."

Mr. Rewbarb pondered this in silence. Finally he discovered the flaw in its logic.

"You said that before," he accused happily.

"My nerves are shot," the radio almost sobbed. "I'm unhappy."

"Got just the thing for you," Mr. Rewbarb promised drunkenly, "a little drink, jus' a lit'l drink and you'll be as good as new."

HE climbed laboriously to his feet and filled his glass before sousing the top of the radio again.

"Feel better?" he asked solicitously.

"No," the radio's voice was a miserable whisper. "My nervsh are shot. Too much cleaning. Now my head ish as big as bucket."

"You haven't got a head?" Mr. Rewbarb cried angrily. "You must think I'm drunk."

"All right," the radio capitulated without a struggle, "I haven't got a head. Jush got antennae ends that drive me batty."

Mr. Rewbarb nodded solemnly.

"Thash bad," he said mournfully, wondering what antennae ends were. "Feel better?" he asked optimistically.

The radio merely moaned.

The whisky was doing things to Mr. Rewbarb. His brain seemed to be functioning more sharply. Things seemed to be clearer, properly focused for a change. He thought a lot and finally an idea, born of a chance remark by the radio, flowered into full bloom.

Mr. Rewbarb lurched to his feet, chuckling. He looked down at the radio and sloshed more liquor over it. Then he giggled again. Everything was going to be wonderful.

First he went to the kitchen and got the egg beater. Then he went to his wife's room and got her electric reducing horse. With this on his shoulder he staggered to a closet and dragged out the vacuum cleaner. He laughed so hard at this point that he fell in a heap in the middle of his equipment and spent five minutes extricating himself. But at last he weaved back to the living room, egg beater in one hand, vacuum cleaner in the other and the electric horse over his shoulder.

It took him some time to plug in all of the devices because he had to stop every little while to take a drink and slosh more over the radio, and then he had to take time out to giggle over everything. So it was a half-hour later before he had everything hooked up satisfactorily.

Mr. Rewbarb climbed awkwardly into the saddle of the electric reducing horse. He teetered precariously and almost fell on his face.

"Whoa!" he cried, throwing both arms about the horse's neck.

Straightening up, he pulled the egg beater from his pocket and with his free hand he picked up the shaft of the vacuum cleaner. He made a delightful discovery at this point.

"I am thoroughly drunk," he said with dignity, "definitely."

Then he turned on the vacuum cleaner. Its banshee wail grew in volume until its noise was beating heavily from wall to wall.

"Ouch," the radio yelled. It tried to say something else, but its voice broke, and a snarling scream blasted from the speaker of the radio.

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Mr. Rewbarb turned off the switch.

"What's the idea?" the radio demanded, when the noise faded. "I can't stand that thing. With my headache, it's like driving nails into me. I'm getting a bad hangover."

Mr. Rewbarb giggled.

"The wages of sin," he whispered, "shall be headaches." He swayed dangerously in the saddle before continuing. "In another shecond I'll turn the vacuum on again. Also the egg beater *and* the electric horsy. When you've got enough, yell."

WITH a blissful smile Mr. Rewbarb tripped the three switches. The noise was deafening. It swelled up like a mighty river of sound and poured through the room in a hideous symphony of noise, noise and more noise. The horse had started lurching rhythmically and Mr. Rewbarb was forced to hang on desperately.

"Got enough?" he managed to yell over the frightful din.

The radio was emitting tortured blasts and squawks that were unintelligible for the most part. One jumbled sentence did seep through however to Mr. Rewbarb's befuddled brain.

"T-U-rn i-T o-FF!"

Mr. Rewbarb cut the switches happily. The sounds faded into oblivion.

"What do you want?" moaned the radio.

"I jush want you to keep quiet," Mr. Rewbarb said sleepily. "You've caused me too much trouble. I want you to keep out of my life from now on. If you don't I'm afraid I'll jush have to give you the works."

"Supposing I say no," the radio said surlily.

Mr. Rewbarb smiled foggily.

"This," he said. He threw all three switches again and hung on frantically as the horse began its electric gyrations. The radio squawked wildly and hoarsely, but Mr. Rewbarb realized with drunken wisdom that the time for mercy had passed. A lesson was needed and this was the time to administer it.

He locked his legs under the horse's belly and found himself enjoying the ride. He waved the egg beater merrily around his head as he lurched back and forth and, with his other hand, he made a great fuss with the vacuum cleaner.

"HIHO SILVER," he cried joyously. This was fun, he was discovering excitedly. "Awaaaaaay!" he hiccoughed dramatically.

Suddenly the front door of the living room opened and Mr. Glick, Mrs. Rewbarb and a white-haired doctor swarmed into the room. There was a startled, dismayed gasp, as they saw the wildly bizarre scene confronting them.

Mr. Rewbarb became aware that spectators had arrived.

"Jush in time for the second show," he bawled cheerfully. He doffed the egg beater in a gallant bow. Bending was a bad mistake. Everything fused together crazily for an instant and then he pitched forward from the horse, and landed with a pleasant thud on the top of his head.

"Good night," he muttered.

MRS. REWBARB knelt tearfully beside him.

"It's all my fault," she sobbed. "I shouldn't have left him alone."

Mr. Glick turned off the electric equipment. No one noticed the relieved gasp from the radio.

"What do you suppose the trouble is, Doctor?" Mr. Glick asked anxiously.

"It is really somewhat simple," the Doctor said with professional modesty. "I recognized the symptoms when he visited me yesterday. The man is suffering from frustration. You see how

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he mounts a horse and pretends to be a conquering hero when he is left alone. That is because he is not given sufficient opportunity to express his personality. The cure is simple.

"From now on he must not be hampered in any way. He must be the dominant one, particularly in the home. Consult him on all points, no matter how trivial. Accept his judgment, his opinion on everything. Let him have his own way completely. There must be no bickering, no nagging, no harping. He is and must remain undisputed master. That is the cure. You must all be careful to obey it."

Mr. Glick nodded miserably.

"I'll have to give him a better job now. I can't leave him where he is."

Mrs. Rewbarb sighed peacefully.

"I always wanted a masterful husband, and now I've got one."

Mr. Rewbarb suddenly opened one eye. Then very cautiously he opened the other. He still felt fine, but he was getting awfully sleepy. There was one thing he had to know however.

"Jennifer," he said.

"Yes, darling?"

"Turn on the radio."

"Y—yes darling."

A few seconds later Mr. Rewbarb heard the click of a switch. Then a voice broke in, "Thish ish the Standard Broadcasting Company."

Mr. Rewbarb sat up on one elbow. "Whash that?"

The voice from the radio said petulantly, but carefully, "I said *this is* the Standard Broadcasting Company."

"Oh that's fine," Mr. Rewbarb said. Then he fell asleep.

BANDITS OF TIME

The lottery for mates in Tork's New Era of two million and ten A.D. . . . Tork ready to address his people . . . And now Rhodana glides forward, the light glinting on the blade in her hand . . . Greggson sees her, gestures, raises his weapon . . . By some miracle, Tork is aware of the danger . . . He whirls . . . A ray spits from his belt . . . Greggson's body falls . . .

A mutter of angry men surging forward . . . Greggson—one of them! . . . Revolt in the New World!

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DECEMBER ISSUE

AMAZING STORIES

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"RACKET" BUSTERS

By WILBUR ORSON

OF LATE you've no doubt been hearing a lot about "anti-noise" campaigns—campaigns designed to keep guys from honking their horns at old ladies with weak hearts and in general to keep city people a little quieter. Well, these campaigns are nothing new. The cultured Greeks of Sybaris, 600 B.C., enforced a law which prohibited industrial noises in residential sections and provided for zoning in the city. The Sybarites were so "silence-minded" that the Romans often told a joke about the Sybarite who couldn't sleep because a petal was crumpled in his bed of roses.

Carlyle became so nervous at the sound of a crowing cock that he had a sound-proof room to work in. Schopenhauer, the German philosopher, was tortured by the crack of a carter's whip, and said, "Noise is the true murderer of thought." Herbert Spencer, the great thinker, was so affected by the slightest noise that he always worked with his ears plugged with wool. Thomas Edison believed that unless steps were made against noise the human race would go deaf in 100 years.

During World War I deafness caused by shell-shock was rather common, and during this war deafness due to bomb shock is also quite common, but few people know that civilization has brought deafness to more people than wars. As our cities have been increasing in size, they also increase in noise intensity; hence there is a growing deafness among printers, bus drivers, road breakers, and traffic policemen. In New York, automobile and taxi drivers are becoming hard of hearing. Likewise boilermakers and others exposed to constant riveting noise are losing their hearing. Psychologists believe that many taxi drivers and cops are short-tempered because of the constant noise. They explain it, oddly enough, as a form of "shell-shock."

In an effort to make their cities quieter, German scientists, before the war, had perfected a silent automobile horn. The device sends and picks up so-called supersonic waves—sound waves pitched so high that the human ear can't hear them.

The driver of a car equipped with these silent horns merely presses a button when he approaches an intersection. The supersonic waves are broadcast and picked up by other cars, causing small lights to flash on the dashboard of the car receiving the signal. Thus the silent horn sends out its warning, unstopped by hills, curves, or any other blind spots.

Of course, today, in Berlin the silent horn does as much to keep things quieter as it would help if you were to whisper in front of a concrete mixer with the hope of not adding to the noise. What the Berliners are secretly hoping for is something that will keep English bombs from blasting them out of night after night of sleep. It is rumored that the closest thing to a gadget of this kind is a bomb meter which is supposed to tell how far away bombs are dropping and when it becomes dangerous for you to stay at home instead of heading for the nearest shelter. If this rumor is true, and we doubt it, the inventor is going to find that he's been wasting his time because it's unlawful to be on the streets after an air-raid warning.

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People of the PYRAMIDS

BY P. F. COSTELLO

A ball of flame lashed out at him from the pyramid's entrance

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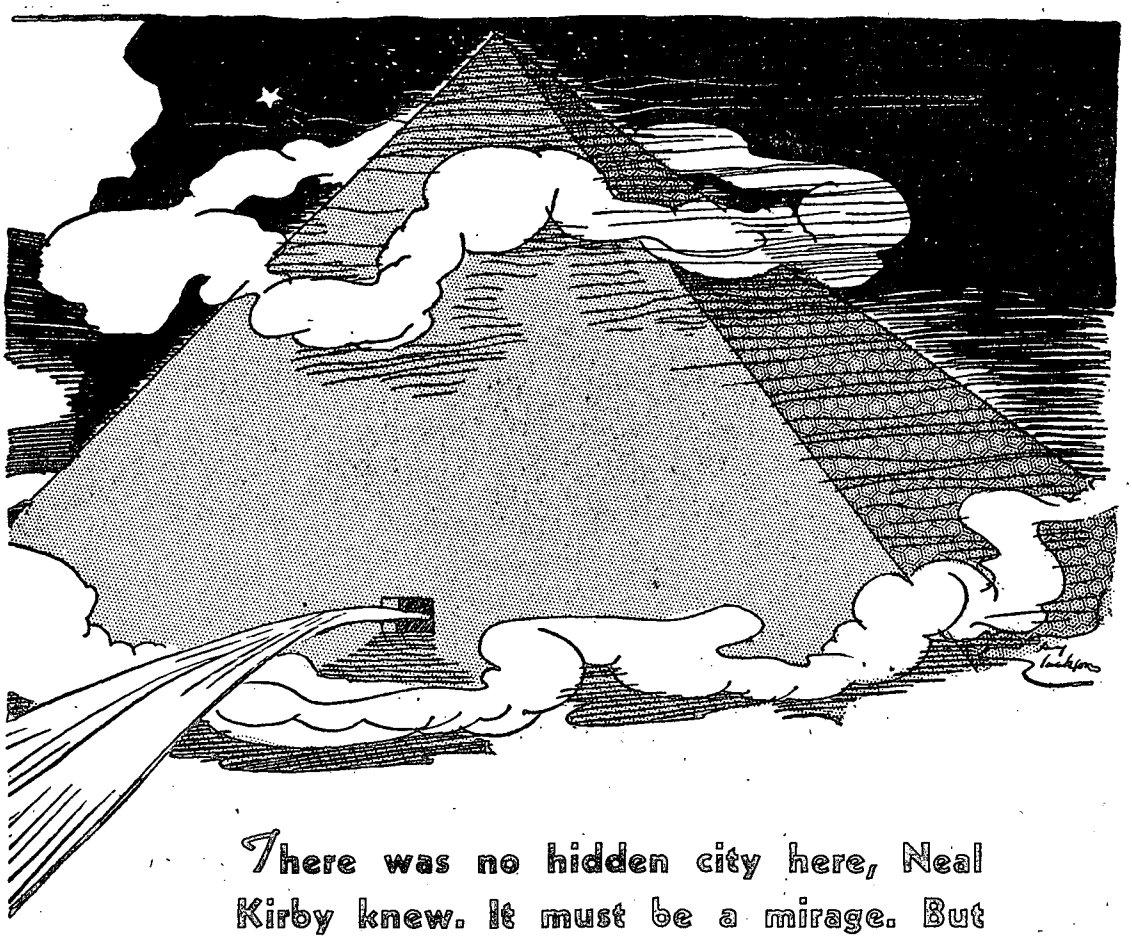

There was no hidden city here, Neal Kirby knew. It must be a mirage. But men aren't murdered because of a vision!

"COME, come," the fat, brown-skinned proprietor of the gaudy little shop in Cairo cried with more enthusiasm than coherence. "Lukka, lukka," he said proudly, waving a fat arm at the piles of merchandise stacked in the interior of his shop.

Neal Kirby grinned good-naturedly and allowed himself to be half-dragged, half-led into the establishment. He knew he was perfectly secure against the wiles of the fat shop-keeper for he only had one American dollar in his pocket. And his appetite had already staked a claim on that dollar for dinner.

With the proprietor pattering hopefully at his heels he browsed up and down the narrow aisles examining the ropes of cheap beads, the gayly colorful silks and satins and the thousand-and-one sleepy-looking Buddhas, of all sizes and shapes, that stared at him from the shelves.

He was turning to leave when a steely glitter in a corner caught his eye. Looking closely he saw that it was a narrow silver casket with a glass top that had caught the light. Through the glass top he could see a slim stiletto-like knife resting on a pad of red silk. Strangely, it excited his curiosity. He wondered vaguely why a piece of merchandise of

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such obvious value should be tucked away in the darkest corner of the shop.

"How much?" he asked, pointing to the casket.

The proprietor shook his head until his fat jowls quivered like cups of jelly.

"No sale, no sale," he said breathlessly. He grabbed Neal by the arm. "Come, come," he waved to the displays on the opposite side of the shop. "Lukka, lukka."

Neal shook his head. Stubbornness had been added to his curiosity now. Disregarding the angry squeals of the fat shopkeeper, he bent and picked up the casket. Opening the casket, he almost gasped at the incredible beauty of the knife.

The blade, about eight inches long, gleamed as if it had been delicately forged from pure silver and the handle was formed in the shape of a man's torso, from some strange red metal that glowed with a fiery luminescence. A small, cunningly chiseled head topped the handle of the knife, and at the neckline where it joined the torso, it was circled by a cluster of small, but perfect diamonds.

Neal whistled in admiration. He was no judge of precious stones and metals but anyone could see that the knife would be worth a Rajah's ransom. So absorbed was he in the contemplation of the fabulously beautiful knife that he did not hear the sudden sharp exclamation that sounded from the wheezing proprietor. He didn't hear the footsteps behind him, but he did hear the quiet, sibilant voice that cut through the silence.

"Give me that knife!"

NEAL turned in surprise. Two people stood behind him.

One was a man of medium height with a thin, arrogant face and sandy hair but Neal did not take time to notice anything else about him, for he was too busy staring in admiration at the girl who was with him.

She was tall, with hauntingly blue eyes, and fine blonde hair that cascaded in graceful waves almost to her shoulders. Her slender, charmingly feminine figure was accentuated by the smartly tailored white gabardine suit she wore. She looked cool and fresh and American.

Neal smiled suddenly. Just seeing a girl like this made him feel certain that Cairo was a fine place after all.

"It's a small world, isn't it?" he said to her.

She looked anxiously at the man she was with and murmured something under her breath that he didn't hear. Neal's smile faded as he looked closely at the girl. There was a hidden fear lurking in the depths of her eyes and he saw that the small handkerchief in her hands had been twisted into a small, crushed ball.

Her companion held out his hand imperiously.

"Will you give me the knife?" he snapped. "Or must I summon the police?"

Neal stiffened at the man's tone. There was something so definitely insulting in it that he felt a hot flush of anger staining his face. His big hands closed spasmodically over the knife in his hands.

"You might get better results," he suggested as coolly as he could, "if you'd stop snarling at people and improve your manners. The word 'please' can work wonders in a lot of cases. You might look it up some time."

The man swallowed a reply and his jaw clamped shut. His face had drained white and his small, steel-blue eyes hardened into pin-points of angry light.

"Will you give me that knife?" he almost whispered. His hand slipped

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slowly into the outside pocket of his coat, where a suspicious bulge showed.

Neal straightened slowly, his eyes narrowing to mere slits. He had not missed the gesture or its significance. In spite of the tenseness of the situation he was able to realize that the incident was strange in every respect. The man's rage and impatience were wholly unreasonable, completely out of proportion to the trifling affair. The girl was looking imploringly at her companion and her hands were clasped tensely together as if in silent supplication.

THE fat, waddling shopkeeper shoved himself between them at that instant, stammering breathless apologies. And as suddenly and abruptly as that the incident was over. The thin man with the arrogant face withdrew his hand from his pocket and went about the business of lighting a cigarette. Neal relaxed slowly. He couldn't quite convince himself that it was all over. One instant, he knew, the man opposite him was ready to draw his gun and fire. And now he was placidly lighting a cigarette with fingers that were as steady as rocks.

The girl had been talking to the shopkeeper, showing him a withered paper in her hand, and now he turned to Neal, smiling nervously.

He pointed to the knife which Neal still held in his hand.

"Give to Missy," he said imploringly. "Belong her."

Neal hesitated an instant, and he was aware that the burning eyes of the girl's companion were resting unwaveringly on him.

"Please," the girl said simply.

Neal shrugged and handed the girl the knife. As his fingers met hers, he felt paper crackle under his fingers, felt a closely wadded note pushed against his palm. His fingers closed on it automatically and he shoved his fist in his pocket.

"Thank you," the girl said quickly.

She dropped the brilliantly gleaming knife into her handbag, turned and left the shop. The thin, arrogant, steel-eyed man followed her without a backward glance.

"Go," the fat shopkeeper said nervously. "Go, please."

Neal pulled out the wad of paper and spread it flat against his hand. The only information it contained was the name of a hotel and a room number. Neal frowned and shoved it back into his pocket. That didn't tell him much about the screwy business.

He sauntered from the shop, his thoughts churning futilely. Quiet deliberation was not his most successful accomplishment and he felt queerly impotent and helpless. There was only one thing to do, he decided, after a few moments of anxious cogitation. He pulled the paper that the girl had slipped to him from his pocket and noted the address and room number. Then he walked on whistling.

THE soft Egyptian night had dropped its black mantle over Cairo, lending an almost mystic enchantment to the intertwined streets and the murmuring voices of natives. Under the merciful light of a full pale moon, the desert stretches surrounding the silent city, looked cool and calm and inviting. But those who knew the desert were aware of its ruthless reality, its cruelty, its danger.

The lobby of the Hotel Internationale was practically deserted when Neal Kirby strolled across its polished floor and stopped at the desk of the blandly polite young native who acted as clerk and receptionist.

"Is the young lady in 402 in?" he

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asked.

The clerk nodded.

"Did you have an—"

"She's expecting me," Neal said quickly. Turning, he strode to the elevator. He realized disgustedly that he had acted tactlessly. The girl had taken such precautions in slipping him the note that it was obvious she didn't want it known that he was to see her. He had spoiled that by inquiring for her like a breathless sophomore.

He stepped from the elevator at the fourth floor. The hotel was completely modern, with luxuriously thick carpeting and walls paneled with smooth, dark oak. The heavy rug smothered the sounds of his footsteps as he started down the corridor, looking for 402.

He passed three doors before he found it. Suddenly he began to feel nervous. He paused before the door, his throat strangely dry. Maybe this whole thing was a joke of some sort. Or maybe he had received the note by mistake. A dozen other disturbing thoughts occurred to him, but he dismissed them all with a characteristic shrug. He raised his hand to knock when he heard a sudden scuffling noise from inside the room. It was followed by a quick, gasping cry of terror.

Neal hesitated for only a bare instant and then he grabbed the door-knob, shook it violently.

The door was locked. Neal drew back and lunged at the door, driving his heavy shoulders against its hard surface. A splintering crack sounded and the door swung inward suddenly, almost throwing him off balance.

The room was dark, but there was enough moonlight to show him the shadowy outline of two figures struggling near the window. In spite of the uncertain illumination he recognized one of the figures as the girl he had met in the curio shop. She was struggling helplessly against a man whose both hands were wrapped about her neck.

THE man looked up as Neal charged into the room. He dropped the limp body of the girl and sprank toward the window, which opened on the fire escape.

Neal dove across the room and his shoulder drove into the man's back, slamming him against the wall. He heard a grunt of pain escape the man's lips, but like an eel, the dark figure squirmed from his grasp and dove for the window.

Neal lunged after him, his right fist swinging in a wild looping arc. It crashed into the side of the man's head as he scrambled over the window ledge, knocking him out onto the balcony formed by the fire escape.

Neal threw the window open wider, but before he could clamber out his intended victim scrambled to his feet and darted down the steps. Neal had one quick look at the man's dark terrified features before he disappeared.

Wheeling from the window, Neal stepped quickly across the room and closed the door that he had forced. He groped about until he found a lamp and switched it on. He knew there would be no chance of catching the native who had fled down the fire escape, and the girl might be seriously hurt. She was lying on the floor next to a sofa, unconscious. There were angry red marks on her throat, but he could see the rise and fall of her breast under the light flimsy dressing gown she was wearing.

He lifted her carefully in his arms, stretched her on the sofa and rubbed her hands anxiously. After a moment or so her eyelids flickered and he noticed a touch of color returning to her cheeks. With her long, fine hair framing her white face she looked more like an angel

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than a human being.

She was breathing more normally now, Neal noticed. He poured a glass of water from a pitcher on the coffee table, tilted her head slightly and poured some of its contents down her throat.

She coughed weakly and opened her eyes. For an instant she stared blankly at him, and then, as recognition came to her, she smiled tremulously.

"I was afraid you wouldn't come," she murmured. Her hands moved slowly to her throat, touched the abrasions on her skin.

"Don't talk if it hurts," Neal said, concerned. "What you need is rest."

"It doesn't hurt," the girl assured him. "I'm still a little frightened, that's all. Silly of me. I should be getting used to it by now."

"You mean this has happened before?" Neal asked incredulously.

The girl was silent an instant, and then she turned her eyes full on Neal. In them was mirrored the tragic finality of despair.

"I was wrong to involve you in my troubles," she said brokenly. "Please go now while there is still time. I—it may be dangerous for you to stay another minute."

Neal grinned cheerfully and tossed his hat onto an empty chair. He lighted a cigarette and blew a cloud of smoke toward the ceiling expansively.

"You can't get rid of me that easily," he chuckled.

"Oh please," the girl said miserably. "You think it's something of a lark, something amusing. Can't you see I'm serious?

Neal's face sobered.

"The cute little chap who was trying to strangle you was serious too," he said drily. "That's why I'm sticking around until I know what's up. Funny streak in me. I dislike seeing young girls murdered. I don't know why. But everybody has their peculiarities and that happens to be mine."

"Would you like me to start at the beginning?" she asked abruptly.

"Now you're talking," Neal grinned. "I may not be of any help, but I'm in your corner from now on."

The girl relaxed as if a heavy weight had been removed from her shoulders.

"Thank you," she said simply. She was silent for a few seconds before resuming.

"MY name is Jane Manners," she said quietly. "My father was a well known archaeologist. When he died several years ago he left me a manuscript which contained a map and directions for reaching a city somewhere in the Egyptian desert. He had visited the city years before and it had been his consuming ambition to return there before he died. His last wish was that I would go there and complete the archaeological work he had begun. I didn't have the necessary funds so I put the trip off. Then I received an offer of help. It came from an Austrian, Max Zaraf, who said that he had known my father in Egypt."

"Was he the gent I met today?" Neal interrupted.

"Yes. He financed the expedition. At first I was delighted by the assistance, but things have happened which make me believe I made a very serious mistake."

"What sort of things?" Neal asked.

"In the first place," Jane answered, "he insisted that I let him keep the map. I gave it to him without hesitation. That same night I was almost killed by a heavy piece of iron that dropped from the deck above me. The officers on the boat were unable to explain the accident. Again, three nights later, I was almost killed by a knife hurled

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through my porthole. It missed me by inches."

Neal whistled silently.

"Why didn't you ask Zaraf to return the map to you and call the whole deal off?"

Jane shook her head miserably.

"I wasn't sure he had anything to do with it. I'm not yet, for that matter. And if I back out I may never get another opportunity to carry out Dad's last wishes."

Neal glanced down at his knuckles.

"Did it occur to you that it was too late to back out? That is, if Zaraf is the little dark boy in the woodpile. If he made two attempts on your life he certainly wouldn't give you back the map now and let you walk out on him at this late date. If you tried you'd just be sealing your own death warrant."

"I thought of that," Jane answered. "There wasn't anything to do but go along with him and hope for the best."

"Which won't be any too good, if I'm any judge of character," Neal said drily. "But what about the knife you got at the curio shop? How does that fit into the picture?"

"I don't know," Jane answered, frowning. "In Dad's manuscript he made it very clear that before starting the trip I should stop here in Cairo and pick up that knife. He left it here on his last trip. It must be important or he wouldn't have been so insistent about it. The shopkeeper knew him and had promised to keep the knife until he returned for it, or sent for it. The paper which I showed the shopkeeper was written by Dad and was a sort of a claim-check on the knife."

"One more question," Neal grinned. "How did you happen to pick me for a Boy Scout?"

The girl smiled slightly.

"Maybe," she answered, "because you look like a Boy Scout. I scribbled my address on a piece of paper while you and Max were glaring at each other in the curio shop. Afterward I told myself that I had acted foolishly, that you'd never bother to investigate a silly, impulsive gesture like that."

"That was a serious mistake in judgment," Neal told her lightly.

As he finished speaking a hinge creaked faintly behind him. Then a suave icy voice said:

"A very serious mistake, indeed!"

NEAL didn't turn. Instead he watched Jane Manners. Her eyes looking over his shoulders were filled with a sudden, shocked fear.

"Max!" she whispered.

Neal stood up and turned slowly. Unconsciously his big hands tightened into hard, blocky fists. In the doorway, smiling without humor, stood Max Zaraf. The trailing smoke from the cigarette in his hand curled up past his lean, saturnine face, dimming slightly the cold, deadly glitter of his eyes. But Neal, watching the man closely, was sure there was disappointment in those eyes. Disappointment and a slight trace of uncertainty.

"Are you all right, my dear?" Zaraf asked softly, ignoring Neal.

Neal grinned, a tight mirthless grin. Zaraf acted as if he hadn't been expecting to find things quite as they were.

"Why shouldn't she be?" Neal asked, before Jane could answer.

Zaraf shrugged and stepped into the room. His eyes flicked meaningly to the shattered lock of the door.

"Logical question, isn't it?" he asked silkily. "Door forced open. Room upset. A tempestuous young American violating the privacy of a young woman's room. It all adds up, does it not?"

"Max!" Jane said sharply. "You're being insulting.

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"You're also being very careless of your health," Neal said pointedly.

Zaraf turned slightly and looked straight at Neal. The slight smile vanished from his features. Neal saw a new, wary look creep into Zaraf's cold eyes, and he realized that the man had just recognized him as the American he had encountered at the curio shop.

"What is your game, my young friend?" he asked coolly. "This couldn't possibly be a coincidence. If it is, let me assure you that it might be a most unlucky one—for you."

"It is not a coincidence," Jane said quietly. "I asked Mister—" she faltered, and Neal realized that he hadn't told her his name.

"Kirby," he said quickly. "Neal Kirby. You must have forgot."

"Thank you," Jane said gratefully. "I asked Mr. Kirby to come here," she resumed, "because I thought I might need him."

"For what?" Zaraf asked.

Neal wondered what reason the girl would give for asking him here. To tell the truth would reveal to Zaraf her suspicions concerning him. He looked at her, and her eyes met his in an imploring glance, before she faced Zaraf. Her slender body stiffened and her chin raised slightly as she said:

"I have hired Mr. Kirby," she said clearly, "as consulting archaeologist. He will leave with us tomorrow morning."

ZARAF'S steely calm was shaken.

"Are you out of your mind?" he asked hoarsely.

Neal stared at Jane in amazement. It was preposterous, out of the question, completely unthinkable. He didn't know a thing about archaeology in the first place, and secondly, why should he be wandering over the desert looking for lost cities? It didn't make sense.

Then he looked at Jane, and suddenly it did make sense. For some crazy reason it became the most logical thing in the world for him to go anywhere, do anything this girl wanted. She was looking at him beseechingly, hope and confidence shining in her eyes.

He turned to Zaraf, smiling faintly at the man's obvious consternation.

"That's right," he said cheerfully. "I'm the new archaeologist. I'm not such a hot archaeologist, but I'm a pretty good shot and I hear the desert is just full of snakes and rats."

Zaraf struggled to restrain his anger. His cheeks were touched with red and his cold eyes were twin pools of hate. But his voice was as soft as silk as he said:

"You have to shoot a snake *before* it stings you. Remember that my young friend." He turned then, and with a mocking bow to the girl, left the room.

"Lovely fellow," Neal murmured.

"He's dangerous and cruel," Jane said worriedly. "I—I shouldn't have gotten you into this. I have a terrible feeling that I'll hate myself for it. If anything should happen to you, I'd feel as if it were my fault."

Neal picked up his hat and smiled down at her.

"Forget it," he said. He sauntered to the door, and grinned back at her. "I wasn't kidding, you know, when I told our chum that I was a pretty good shot. The fact is I'm a damn good shot. See you tomorrow."

THE tiny caravan of four camels and three attendants wound its way from Cairo the following day, as the blazing morning sun served notice that the day would be scorching hot.

Each camel carried a passenger, and was led by a native attendant at the end of a stout rope. The fourth camel

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carried huge leather sacks of water. It was roped to the last camel in the train and clumped awkwardly along, apparently unimpressed by the fact that it carried the most precious commodity of the desert—water.

On the lead camel rode Max Zaraf. Behind him rode Jane Manners and bringing up the rear was Neal Kirby, swaying awkwardly on his lurching steed, and feeling uncomfortable and strange in his pith helmet and breeches and boots.

Zaraf had the map in his possession and gave the directions of travel to the native guides. For two days the trip was monotonously uneventful, varying little in detail from hour to hour. They traveled for the most part in the cool of the morning and evening and laid up during the blistering heat of the day. The terrain was endlessly unchanging. Slight rises of sand gave way to sloping valleys that led only to still another hill.

On the evening of the third day Zaraf waved them to a stop and Neal climbed stiffly from his camel, glad to ease his muscles after a hard four-hour stretch. He walked through the soft sifting sand and assisted Jane Manners to alight. Zaraf was walking back toward them from his camel. They had stopped just below the summit of a rather high hill, and the fine top sand was blowing down on them in swirling, uncomfortable clouds.

"We stop here," Zaraf announced, coming up to them.

"Here?" Neal echoed. "Let's go over the hill to the valley. We'll get out of this wind that way."

The native drivers, dark-skinned and inscrutable, waited stolidly for orders. They were a proud, silent breed of men, neither volunteering information, nor expecting it. As long as they received their money for the day's work, it didn't matter what their white-skinned masters did.

Zaraf glared balefully at Neal.

"I have said we will stop here," he repeated angrily. "I'm deciding on our course and if I decide to stop here it's because I have excellent reasons for doing so."

Neal shrugged. It seemed a small matter to argue about. Maybe Zaraf did have a good reason for stopping here.

"Okay," he said, "if you can stand the sand I guess Jane and I can put up with it."

Zaraf turned without a word and walked back to his camel. The natives went to work building a shelter, and preparing the evening meal. The camels, relieved of their packs, settled placidly down on their haunches, like so many quiet cows.

Darkness fell swiftly. Neal said good-night to Jane and turned in early. The fires burned out in a few hours and before the moon came up the tiny camp was slumbering.

NEAL awoke the following morning as the first rays of the rising sun slanted into his eyes. He blinked sleepily and yawned. His first thought was of water. Every morning he awoke thirsty, for the desert's searing heat dried out the moisture in his body as he slept. He climbed to his feet, stuck his feet into his boots and pulled on his shirt. Then he crawled out of the narrow pup tent, straightened up and looked around.

For an instant he stared about unbelievingly. The camels and the native guides were nowhere in sight. The black ashes of the evening's fire still showed as cancerous spots against the whiteness of the sand, but the natives' sleeping gear and packs — and more vital, the camels—were vanished as completely as if the earth had opened

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and swallowed them.

For seconds Neal was too stupefied to act. All he could do was s t a r e in numbed bewilderment at the bleak expanse of the desert.

When his dazed senses finally recovered, he wheeled and charged toward the other two sleeping tents.

"Zaraf! Jane!" he shouted. "On your feet. Our guides have pulled a fade-out with the equipment and camels."

He was so excited that he did not notice the abysmal silence that seemed to stretch over the desert like a vast tight blanket.

Reaching Zaraf's tent he jerked open the flap. He opened his mouth but the excited words on his lips died there. For Zaraf's sleeping pad was undisturbed. It had obviously not been used that night.

Neal felt the cold of panic close over his heart. For a silent, timeless instant he stared incredulously at Zaraf's empty tent—then he was racing madly through the thick sand toward Jane's tent. He shouted her name wildly and the hills threw back the mockery of an echo.

He ripped open the flap without waiting for an answer to his shout. One glance showed him it was empty. The sleeping pad had been used, for it was twisted and tossed into a jumbled heap. Neal's eyes picked quickly about the interior, noticing the generally disarrayed condition of the sleeping articles and clothes. One corner of the tent sagged drunkenly inward, and he could see that the rope and peg had pulled out of place. Everything pointed to a struggle or rough house of some sort. Neal stood up, a frantic fear clawing at his attempted calmness. As far as his eye could reach, the desert s a n d s spread in a never-varying, never-ending expanse of sun and heat.

"Jane!" he shouted desperately. "Jane! . . . Jane!"

The echo mocked him.

Neal peered into Jane's tent again. A comb and hair brush were lying on the canvas floor, along with her wrist watch and a ring she usually wore. Neal's frown deepened. Jane wouldn't have left things like that if—if—

One inevitable conclusion forced itself on him. Zaraf had taken Jane by force, and with the camels and water, deserted in the dark of the night. There was no other conclusion possible. Neal realized then, with sickening abruptness, that in all probability this had been in Zaraf's mind from the outset.

NEAL rested o n h i s haunches in Jane's tent and thought carefully for a few moments. He had no water, no food and no means of transportation. His revolver had three shots left in it. The rest of the ammunition was in the camel packs. Except for the sun he had not the slightest means of gauging direction or ascertaining a definite course even if he had one to follow.

Approximately, h e h a d thirty-six hours to live.

"Okay," he muttered to himself. The pleasantness had gone from his features; leaving his face a stiff, expressionless mask. "It's a slim chance, but I'll take it. I may not find you, Max Zaraf but God help you if I do!"

He was crawling from Jane's tent when his hand touched the rent in the canvas. It was an inch-long rip close to the flap opening.

Obeying a strange impulse, Neal examined it closely. He shoved his finger through the tear and wiggled it about in the warm sand beneath the flooring. Suddenly his finger touched something that was not sand. Something that was as cool and hard and smooth as—steel!

Quickly Neal ripped the canvas floor-

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ing aside and dug into the sand with both hands. A second later he drew from the sand a glittering object which he recognized instantly.

It was the be-jeweled knife which he had accidentlly stumbled on in the curio shop in Cairo. He recognized it instantly by the handle, formed as a human torso, and the human head which topped it. The flashing necklace of diamonds scintillated brilliantly in the dim light of the tent.

Neal laughed bitterly and shoved it into his pocket. It was worth a great amount of money, men had probably fought and died over it, but it couldn't buy him a drop of water now.

He retrieved his pith helmet from his own tent and started out. Plowing awkwardly through the burning sand, he headed for the top of the hill, that led, he knew with bitter irony, to just another hill. But still he had to keep on. There was something inside of him, as strong as life itself, which would drive him on until . . .

NEAL KIRBY had given himself thirty-six hours of life. Now, he realized vaguely, as he lurched forward, he was twelve hours past that limit already. Living on borrowed time so to speak. His face was matted with sand-clogged beard and his red-rimmed eyes were like hot points of fire in the blackness of his face.

For two days he had staggered through the blinding heat of the desert without food, without water. He had passed the limits of human endurance, but still he lurched on, some inner voice lashing him forward when his flagging body would quit.

He fell often. Sometimes he lay stretched on the burning sands for minutes before he could crawl back to his feet and stagger on again.

It was almost noon, now, and the sun seemed to be hanging suspended in the sky about a hundred feet above his aching head. He could actually feel the weight of the heat settling on him like a dense, smothering pall. Overhead soaring vultures were converging on his stumbling figure in ever narrowing circles.

Staggering over the top of a hill Neal saw the first sight to relieve the deadly monotony of the desert. Just what it was he couldn't tell, but it looked like a bundle of rags thrown together in a pile at the foot of the slight rise. With a strange flickering hope burning in his breast, Neal made a pathetic effort to run. He fell and slid most of the way, but at the foot of the hill he regained his feet and staggered on. Suddenly from the cluttered dark bundles which he had seen there arose a small cloud of birds, their hideously flapping wings carrying them away from this one other thing on the desert that lived beside themselves.

Neal stopped short, almost gagging. He was close enough to recognize the bundles now as three human forms. Numbly he approached them. Sprawled on the sand with bullet holes in their heads, were the three native guides who had accompanied Zaraf into the desert. Neal stared at them for seconds in dumb silence. Zaraf's treachery had not ended with deserting him in the desert. Here was mute testimony of that.

In spite of everything Neal felt a vicious satisfaction course through him. The bodies of the native guides were unmistakable signposts telling him that he was at least on the right track. The canteens of the native guides were empty so he staggered on again, somehow strengthened by the realization that he couldn't be many hours behind Jane and Zaraf.

An hour later he fell. He was on top

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of another hill overlooking a broad, sloping valley, identical to the other interminable valleys he had crossed, except that this one seemed longer and wider than most of the others. For a half-hour he lay on his stomach trying to find the will and the strength to go on. He heard a faint whirr above and turned weakly just as a huge cadaverous vulture was settling on him. With a hoarse croak of fright the bird veered off and glided down into the valley. Neal hoisted himself painfully to his knees and drew his gun. Why he was so bent on killing the bird he couldn't have told himself. He rested the revolver on his forearm and sighted carefully. The bird was gliding into the valley soaring within six f e e t of the ground when Neal fired.

HE missed. The bird flapped great wings and climbed into the sky to resume his endless circling. But a strange reverberating echo had started across the valley. It magnified the report of the pistol a dozen times until it seemed as if mighty hammers were drumming maddeningly on the ground. Neal listened wonderingly.

Suddenly he noticed a peculiar distortion of the heat waves that were dancing in front of his eyes. Their gossamer lightness and fantastically odd shapes were dissolving and reassorting themselves before his eyes. It was as if all the light waves and heat waves of the valley were broken to bits by the crescendoing clamor of the echoes which were booming across the valley.

The entire atmosphere of the valley, he noticed, was vibrating visibly. Crazy lances of light shot into the sky and the distorted refractions of sun and heat waves merged together into what looked like solid blocks of light. In the center of the valley there appeared a shining shaft of pure white light that was growing wider by the second.

Neal climbed shakily to his f e e t, stunned.

The shaft continued to widen and he saw then that it was not composed of light, but some material that looked like white marble.

The thunderous drumming of the echo culminated in one great crash that seemed mighty enough to shatter the heavens. Then silence settled oppressively over the valley.

The white shaft of marble was widening swiftly now, as if some vast invisible curtain was being drawn back in front of it. Neal watched in fascination as a mighty structure of marble appeared before his eyes, filling the entire valley and almost piercing the clouds with its majestic peak of glittering white. It was formed in the shape of a pyramid, alabaster white, incredibly huge.

The silence was complete now and the fantastic distortions of the atmosphere had ceased. The valley was quiet and tranquil as when he first saw it. Everything was the same except for the appearance of the magnificent white pyramid towering into the heavens.

Neal sagged to his knees. If it was a mirage, it was the most impressive and authentic he'd ever heard of. He was still looking at the gigantic pyramid when he saw the orange bolt of flame flash from its base. It seemed a whip of flame with a large ball of some brightly burning matter attached to it. When he saw that it was heading for him he tried to run, as a man runs from the unknown, but it was too late. Something caressed the back of his head like a hot breath and he stumbled onto his face. The next instant a smothering blanket of blackness settled over him and everything faded out abruptly.

WHEN Neal came to he was lying on a narrow cot in a small room.

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There were no windows that he could see, only one small opening that might be a door. He struggled to a sitting position on the cot. The first thing he realized was that he wasn't thirsty. His lips were still cracked and tender, but he knew from their feel that water had passed over them. His hand touched his matted three-day beard experimentally, and his eyes traveled in mild disgust over his dirty, ragged breeches and scuffed boots.

He leaned back and wondered where he was. Thinking accurately was a difficult proposition. His conscious memory was that of a fantastic white pyramid which had materialized before him on the desert. Before that he had been close on the trail of Max Zaraf and Jane Manners. That thought jolted him.

He climbed to his feet and looked around. The walls were of a peculiar porous material and they seemed to be the source of the pale, glareless illumination that flooded the tiny room. There was no furniture other than the narrow cot, and the small door was locked in some manner from the outside. The problem of getting out, he decided, was not going to be easy.

He sank back onto the cot despairingly. All he could do was wait. An hour passed before he heard a clicking on the outside of the door. Then it swung inward. Neal saw a highly polished boot, white whipcord breeches, and then the tall, gaunt figure of Max Zaraf filled the narrow doorway. His freshly shaven features were touched with a mocking smile and his cold eyes gleamed with sardonic amusement.

"This is a pleasure I hadn't counted on," he said, smiling.

For a stunned instant Neal was too dazed to speak. Even in his astonishment, however, one thing was obvious. Zaraf was in the saddle now or he wouldn't be so completely cool and nonchalant. Every instinct in his body urged him to hurl himself at Zaraf's relaxed figure and throttle the life from the man, but a bump of common sense warned him to proceed cautiously and wait for an opportunity.

"I don't imagine you had counted on seeing me again," he said as easily as he could. "Most men stranded in the desert die there."

"But you didn't," Zaraf smiled. "How persistent of you."

"I had something to live for," Neal answered quietly.

Zaraf shrugged.

"The past is dead," he said, still smiling. "Since you lived through the desert I might give you the chance to continue living. However, that is up to you. If you are willing to do as I say, it can be arranged. If not," he spread his hands in an expressive gesture, "your gallant fight through the desert will be of no avail."

"It is my great pleasure," Neal said recklessly, "to tell you to go to hell. If I had nine lives I'd sacrifice 'em all before I'd lower myself to bargain with a treacherous, rotten snake like you."

Zaraf continued to smile, but two hot flags of color fluttered in his cheeks.

"I came here to offer you a chance for your life. You could have helped me here but that is not to be. For your information we are approximately five hundred feet underground right now. We are in the lost city which Professor Manners discovered. It was never actually a lost city, but rather a hidden city. A strange race of people have developed here, many of them childishly simple in many ways. It is to be my privilege to teach them the benefits of commercialization. You might have helped me and done very well for yourself. It was only an accident that you discovered the secret of the pyramid, but it is an accident which might have

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been profitable to you." He smiled blandly down at Neal. "Many of the charmingly simple people love pageantry and drama so I'll have to devise a spectacular manner in which to usher you into the Great Beyond."

"Where is Jane?" Neal asked suddenly.

"Ahh," Zaraf smiled. "That worries you, does it? Well Jane is not too happy, but I have strong hopes that under my persuasive technique I can make her learn to enjoy the existence I've planned for her."

As he finished speaking he bowed slightly and stepped through the door. It closed immediately behind him.

NEAL paced the narrow room nervously for the next hour. The realization that Jane was near him, possibly within a few hundred feet of him, was maddening. Maddening too, was the realization that she was in Zaraf's hands, helpless. Another hour, as nearly as he could judge, had passed when he heard the faint click of the lock. He paused and watched the door carefully. It swung inward, an inch at a time, until it stood open.

Neal doubled his fists and spread his legs. If a chance to smash his way out of this cell presented itself he was going to grab it.

Seconds later a young girl stepped cautiously into the room. Her skin was a pallid white in color and her large eyes were twin mirrors of fright. She was small and her thin body was trembling under the loose white garment she wore. Her hair was long, and would have been considered beautiful, were it not so dull and lustreless.

Neal unclenched his fists slowly. He had been prepared for just about anything, but this peculiar looking, frightened girl stopped him completely. Her eyes were on his now, and she seemed trying desperately to make him understand something. Finally she held her fingers over her mouth and Neal gathered that she wanted him to keep silent.

Then she reached out and took his hand in her own and pointed through the doorway with her other hand. Her meaning was clear enough to Neal. She wanted him to follow her, but why? Neal didn't stop to argue the question with himself. It might be a trap, but it wasn't likely that they would go to such elaborate lengths to lure him from the cell. Anyway it was better than doing nothing. He decided to follow the girl.

"Lead on, sister," he whispered. "If you're on the level, God bless you."

The girl led him into the corridor that flanked the room in which he had been confined. Looking about he could tell nothing about where he was or where he was going. The walls were blue, and of the same porous composition that constituted the walls of the room he had just left. The corridor stretched ahead endlessly and Neal noticed that every six feet or so a door was built into the wall, identical with the one that led to the room which he had just left. The ceiling was high and vaulted, but was without ornamentation of any sort.

The girl crept softly ahead of him, glancing frequently back to see that he was still following. In another hundred feet they turned at right angles and followed another corridor. For fifteen or twenty minutes they continued, twisting and turning through the labyrinthine passages that interlaced each other at odd angles. Finally the girl stopped at a door, that seemed to Neal identical to the hundreds of others they had passed, and pressed her ear against its surface.

After a silent interval she opened the door cautiously and motioned for Neal to go in. Neal hesitated an instant. If there was anything phoney about the

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set-up this was where the pay-off would be. With a mental shrug he stepped over the threshold and into the room.

"Neal, darling!" a wonderfully familiar voice cried.

"JANE!" Neal whispered unbelievingly. For an instant he stood rooted to the spot, too amazed to move. This had been the farthest thing from his thoughts. She was standing at the opposite side of the room, and in her eyes was relief and joy that made his heart pound faster. She was wearing a loose flowing gown of white and it gave her blonde beauty an almost ethereal quality.

Recovering he crossed to her, took her hands in his.

"Honey," he said fervently, "you're the most welcome sight I've seen in all my life. Are you all right? Has that swine done anything to you?"

"I'm all right," she said breathlessly.

"I heard that you had been brought here and the little girl who is my attendant was willing to take a message to you. Finally she thought she could bring you here easier. She's watching in the hall now so we have a few minuites to talk."

"What's this all about?" Neal asked. "Where are we?"

"We're in the city my father discovered," she answered. "It's underground. A whole tribe of people—offshoots of some highly cultivated desert group—built it as a retreat against their more savage neighbors centuries ago. Here they have progressed amazingly well along certain lines, in electricity for instance, but in other fields they are childishly ignorant.

"Zaraf knew my father years ago and knew that he made this discovery. So his offer to help me was because he wanted access to this city for purposes of exploitation. We arrived here just a few days ahead of you, but fortunately for Zaraf, an evil element of the natives has been planning a revolution against the established ruling system. Being an opportunist Zaraf jumped right in with the revolters and helped them overthrow their ruler."

"And that makes him ace-high with the new management," Neal said reflectively.

Jane nodded.

"He told me all his plans the day after he kidnaped me and left you stranded in the desert. He was sure you were out of the picture forever. He intends to work himself into a position of power, regiment these natives, sell their produce and electrical equipment to the highest bidders. He must be stopped, Neal, he must. These natives are, for the most part, simple and kindly, but they're easily influenced by white people because they worshipped my father. He was very kind and good to them during the years he stayed here, and Zaraf is trading on that."

"Our big job," Neal said, "is to get out of here as fast as we can. Do you have any idea of the size of this place? Or where we are now in relation to the nearest exit?"

Jane shook her head.

"I'm completely lost," she confessed. "I know, however, that we are in one of the larger sleeping sections now. Everyone is up at the throne hall at this time to hear the new instructions from the new ruler. His name is Horjak. That's why it was safe to bring you here through the halls. All the rooms are deserted now. Most of the natives here aren't sympathetic with the new regime, but they are helpless because they have no leader or weapons."

Neal started to speak but a shrill terrified shriek from beyond the door interrupted him. It was followed instantly by a loud banging on the panels.

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Neal heard a harsh voice snapping commands and he knew that Zaraf was outside.

JANE was clinging to his arm desperately.

"You've got to get out of here, darling," she cried.

This was the grim truth, Neal admitted, but there was no other exit from the room. He disengaged Jane's frantic grip on his arm and shoved her into a corner, just as the door crashed inword.

Three small, but heavily muscled men, with the same pallid expression and lusterless hair of the young native girl, spilled into the room. They wore crimson tunics that dropped to the middle of their thighs and sandals with soft spongy soles. They sprang at Neal with a concerted ferocity that amazed him. The first soldier went down under a sledge hammer right hook that carried all of Neal's heavy shoulder behind it. But before he could swing again the other two grabbed his arms. More of the crimson-tuniced guards poured into the room and the struggle was over. Panting, he was dragged from the room into the corridor to face the coldy sneering presence of Max Zaraf.

"I gave you your chance," Zaraf snapped. "You refused it. Now you can accept your alternate choice." He motioned imperiously to the guards. "To the throne room. Quickly!"

Before the guards could move to obey his order Jane rushed into the corridor and blocked their path with outstretched hands.

"You can't do this," she cried to Zaraf. "I won't let you."

Zaraf smiled at her, cynically.

"Since you are so perturbed as to his fate," he said silkily, "I think it would be interesting if you would witness the execution yourself. There's nothing like the presence of a lovely woman to inspire a man to die a hero's death." He nodded to two of the guards. "Take her along."

The husky, crimson-tuniced guards sprang to obey, and after a brief, unequal struggle, the girl was carried away after Neal.

THE throne room was a vast hall lined with tier upon tier of seats extending up to the highest reaches of the amphitheater. In the center of the throne room a huge unadorned dias was erected and on it sprawled a corpulent figure with an overly large head and dense stupid features.

Neal saw all this in one quick glance as he was shoved through a lower tier aisle and led to the large oval enclosure that faced the throne. The entire hall was brilliantly illuminated by the same sort of indirect lighting he had noticed before. Standing next to the figure on the throne was Max Zaraf, a gloating smile of anticipation on his face.

The throne room was quiet, but the tiers of seats were jammed with the native population of the underground city. Neal noticed the silence particularly. It was the brooding silence of a death block before an execution.

Zaraf bowed slightly to the figure on the dias and stepped down to face Neal.

"Very shortly," he said, "you are going to die in a quite spectacular manner. You are a fool and you deserve it. These people are incredibly brilliant in many things, many things which the outside world will pay steeply for. Their invisibility screen with which they surround their central pyramid is one instance. Your pistol shot accidentally disrupted the force field and thus you accidentally stumbled onto the pyramid.

"The blue death, which they can send for fifty feet or fifty miles is one of the most destructive weapons the world will

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ever know. In your case they used a light charge which knocked you out, but they can use it to wipe out whole cities.

"Things like that are more valuable than diamonds in the world today. With clever exploitation who knows how far I can go?" Zaraf smiled and there was a sinister ugliness in the effort. "You, however, Mr. Meddler are not going any farther at all. At my demand Horjak, the new ruler, has ordered your execution. It will be followed by wholesale executions of those who oppose the reign of Horjak."

"A very nice set-up," Neal said quietly. "Those you don't approve of, or who don't approve of you, just get wiped out. It may work, Zaraf, but you'll find living with yourself quite a job."

"I can stand it, I think," Zaraf chuckled mirthlessly. "Now to get down to business. My real reason in coming down here was to point out the highly ingenious method I have selected for your elimination."

He pointed to a rack-like affair that was raised from the floor six or seven feet.

"In words of one syllable," Zaraf continued with relish, "you will be spread-eagled there, tied hand and foot to each of the four posts. Then at a signal from me, the executioner cuts a very slender cord and the most amazing thing happens."

He pointed up to the right and left of the rack, and Neal saw for the first time that a half dozen huge knives were suspended by ropes from the ceiling, parallel to the rack.

"The knives swing down," Zaraf said softly. "They are heavy and will travel very fast. They will pass through your suspended body and that will be that! Your wrists and ankles will still be attached to the posts but the rest of your body will be sliced as neatly as a sausage. Clever, isn't it?"

IN SPITE of himself, Neal felt a horrible revulsion crawling over him. To die was one thing. But to die like a butchered hog in front of a howling mob of savages was quite another.

His eyes circled the arena desperately. Every exit was guarded with a dozen men, every aisle clogged with spectators. His gaze swung back to Zaraf and he used every ounce of will power in his control to force a smile over his features.

"Am I supposed to be frightened?" he asked softly. "Am I supposed to be trembling and begging for mercy now? Sorry to disappoint you, Zaraf, but it doesn't worry me that much."

Zaraf's face flushed an angry red, but without another word, he turned and marched up the steps to the dais. Neal's eyes followed him and then he saw Jane.

Pale and regal, she was standing next to the dais, her arms bound behind her. Neal felt a cold sweat break out on his body. They *couldn't* let her watch. It wasn't human.

Zaraf turned and smiled down at Neal.

"Remember to be your most heroic," he said mockingly. "We have distinguished company present."

The crimson-tuniced guards stepped forward now and grabbed Neal by the arms. His eyes were on Jane, and he hardly felt them shoving him toward the rack. He was trying desperately, frantically to tell her with his eyes that he loved her and would always love her, wherever he might be. He had never said the things he wanted to say to her and this was his last opportunity.

Suddenly a clear, terrible scream of anguish sounded through the vast, packed throne room.

"You can't! You can't! Let me die

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with him!". It was Jane sobbing and crying frantically, stumbling down the steps of the dais toward the execution rack.

"You fool!" shouted Zaraf. "Come back here!"

Leaping from his chair he plunged down the steps after her. Shouts and yells sounded through the throne room, as the natives lent their voices to the excitement.

Neal turned at Jane's scream. The two guards holding him relaxed their grip in the general confusion. With a sudden writhing twist Neal was free. He was weakened from his exposure in the desert, but his right hook was still a dangerous weapon. His first swing caught the guard off balance and dumped him in a complete somersault to the ground. Two more guards rushed at him, but he sidestepped them with a quick leap. As he landed he felt something jab into his thigh with an agonizing pain. Instinctively his hand moved to the spot, his fingers touched a slim, hard object close to his thigh. A surge of hope shot through him, not that he could hope to win, but that at least he could put up an excellent account for himself.

The two guards were closing in on him now, but before they could grab him, his hand flashed from his pocket grasping the strange, diamond-studded knife that he had first seen in the Cairo curio shop and secondly, when he had found it under the canvas flooring of Jane's tent. He had shoved it into his pocket then and forgotten it. His hand closed about the torso-handle of the knife now, and the diamond necklace that topped the torso flashed in a thousand scintillating sparkles as he drew his arm back to slash out at the two guards who were pressing him.

But his arm did not fall! It remained rigidly aloft as though frozen.

FOR the two guards were staring at the knife, fearfully, tremblingly. Hoarse, guttural pleas sounded inarticulately from their throats as they backed away from him, terror-stricken. When they were eight feet from him they suddenly hurled themselves to the floor and grovelled there, mouthing strange incantations. Neal wheeled, and as he flashed the knife about his head, the other guards dropped to their knees, their voices blending with the first two guards.

Taking advantage of this sudden, but inexplicable break, Neal leaped toward the base of the dais where Jane was struggling helplessly with Zaraf.

Horkak, the new ruler, saw Neal charge toward the dais brandishing the scintillating knife in his hand like an avenging angel. With a soft moan of terror he sank to his knees, babbling incoherently.

Zaraf flung Jane to one side and leaped past Neal. He sprinted to the oval enclosure where the guards were moaning and grovelling on their faces.

"Get up!" he screamed. "Get up you yellow hounds. Grab the prisoner and tear him apart with your hands. Get up! Get up!"

But he might have been talking to lumps of clay or sodden logs for all the attention the guards paid his hysterical commands. There was a swelling moaning noise coming now from the rows of packed seats. On their knees and on their faces the natives moaned and chanted their mysterious mumbling incantations.

Neal clasped Jane to him and slashed her bonds with the glittering knife, then he jumped from the dais and started after Zaraf.

Zaraf saw him coming. With one last frantic scream at the oblivious natives, he turned blindly and dashed under the rack. His foot caught on a

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silken cord and hurled him to the ground, but he clambered quickly to his feet.

Then he screamed—madly and hysterically, once.

Neal saw it happen, saw the complete, incredibly horrible death by which Max Zaraf paid for his sins.

His foot had tripped the knife release under the rack, and when he sprang to his feet, the heavy, speeding knives—poised for Neal's execution—flashed downward with the devastating force of razor-sharp cleavers. Twelve blades there were, and each one found at least part of its target.

SHAKEN, Neal made his way to Jane's side. She was slumped at the foot of the dais, sobbing. He slipped his arm around her shoulder.

"It's all over darling," he murmured softly. "I think we can straighten things out now."

He looked up as a calm, wise looking old man with long white hair approached slowly.

"I am a friend," the old man said softly. "I am not afraid of the knife of Sali, the Goddess of Death. For I gave it to Professor Manners when he was here so many years ago. It was a pledge of our friendship and he always promised that he would bring it with him on his return."

"Why are the people afraid of it?" Neal asked.

The old man shrugged.

"People are afraid of things they do not understand. Years, centuries ago, it was believed by my people that Death was a woman who chose her victims in the dark and killed them with just such a knife as you hold in your hand. That knife was venerated by our people and prayed to, that it might spare them its sting. It was believed invincible.

"As ruler, I discouraged such outmoded beliefs, and to further eliminate the belief I gave the sacred knife of Sali to Professor Manners. But I have been deposed as ruler, and under the influences of barbaric customs once again, you see how quickly my children revert to the beliefs and customs of their fathers."

"A lucky thing for us they did," Neal said. "What goes now? Will you take your job back as ruler around here?"

The white haired old man smiled.

"If my people want me," he said simply, "I will be happy to retain my authority."

Neal put his hand under Jane's chin and lifted her head up.

"No more crying now," he whispered. "Everything's all set. The regular ruler is stepping back into the job and he's a great old guy. Why—why I'll bet he can even marry people!"

NATURE IS NOT ALWAYS WONDERFUL

THERE are many times when the wonders of Nature provide dismal and pathetic letdowns, and one of these is its occasional creation of life without first providing sustenance for that life. In the case of opossums bearing litters of eighteen young, this is true, for only a dozen out of the eighteen can possibly be fed by the mother opossum.

But perhaps this is Nature's survival-of-the-fittest axiom being enacted. For the twelve young who are first to reach the mother's side after birth are the ones to survive. They are then fed constantly for six weeks while the remainder of the litter must watch on and die of starvation.

EXTRA LOAD FOR THE OVERWEIGHT

THE additional poundage which the fat man must carry is not the only penalty he must pay for his obesity. It has been estimated that for every pound of fat existing in the human body, a minimum of six tenths of a mile of blood vessels is required to feed each pound. In other words, those of you who worry about that waistline, for every five pounds of superfluous flesh you carry, you've the additional baggage of three extra miles of blood vessels to tote around. Please pity the circus fatties whose combined extra veinage could quite possibly encircle the globe. Their slogan could well be "Around the world On A Waistline."

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FRESH FACTS ABOUT FISH

By FESSLER SPAULDING

PERHAPS you're the scientific sort of an egg who can talk on for hours about our finny friends, the fish, and pile out reams of information on said particular form of animal life. However, no matter how well you know your fish lore, we're certain that these will be a few authentic fish yarns with which you are totally unfamiliar.

Like that playful and unpronounceable little devil called the *Periophthalmus Schlosseri.* He climbs trees.

Mr. Fish Schlosseri—to make a tough name still difficult—has the unique ability to climb trees whenever he darned well feels like it. A native of Malaysia, this frisky wriggler can—when the tides are out—flop himself up through the muddy sand until he reaches whatever trees are bordering the water. Then, quite casually and without much effort at all, he scales the trees by means of a pair of tenacious, leg-like fins on the fore part of his body. The object of all this trouble on the part of this unusual species of fish is to obtain the many insects that infest the tree trunks and foliage.

But if you think the antics of the aforementioned wriggler are strange, you ought to meet another odd species of the fish world who also delights in acting anything but like the fine finned fellow he's expected to be. The name of this fellow is a bit easier to pronounce than that of the previous one. It is *Anabas Scandens.*

Mr. Anabas Scandens has as his particular odd characteristic the amazing ability to travel as far as a mile overland on his own power. And there's no catch to it, believe us.

There is a definite reason behind the frequent strange behavior of Mr. Anabas Scandens. It seems, that he only makes his on-land journeys when he can't avoid it, that is to say, when the particular stream he happens to be inhabiting at the moment is due to go dry on him. Then, with incredible dexterity, he hikes it unerringly over dry land to the nearest spot where his instinct tells him there is water to be found again. And the time it takes generally doesn't bother him either, for he can go for as long as a week out of water!

And then there's another chap on our curio list of strange fish who has a neat little trick all his own that would practically make the legendary Dead Eye Dick drop dead of shame. This fish—he's called the *Meaked Chaetodin,* and hails from India—actually packs a rod, or at least a water pistol!

Mr. Beaked Chaetodin has a strangely extra-long nozzle that is like the barrel of a gun in its appearance. And it is through this curious aperture that our finny friend carries on his target practice. It seems that when said fish spies a fly or some other sort of insect hanging rather low on a branch beside the river, he flips his fins in that direction, coasts stealthily up under the branch where the unwary bug basks, and squirts an unbelievably accurate drop of water smack into the side of the poor insect, thus knocking the bug into the water where the pistoling fish can gobble him up!

All of which should go to show you that the lowly fish next to grace your dinner table at some near date quite probably might have talents other than serving as a tasty meal. Remember this, and then dig in with more respect.

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WATER, WATER EVERYWHERE . . .

A fine kettle of fish for two-fisted eaters! Here's what may happen if this war goes to scientific limits

By JEP POWELL

"THIS is a right tasty mess of seawater, Ma."

"Glad you like it, Pa. Pass your plate for some more."

Silly? No, maybe a bit premature but not silly. No sillier than for you to be offered a second helping of spuds, or a dab of grits down in Georgia, where I came from.

There may come a time when seawater will be the only vittles we can get, and we'll be mighty glad to square off in front of a heaping plate of the stuff.

How come? It's a long story, so let me begin at the beginning—Wait! Draw in your belt a notch or two. Okay—

You can lay it all at Science's doorstep. Science, like the proverbial wind, blows some bad and it blows some good. The mess of marine grub is the good blast. The bad blow comes first.

While Europe, Asia and Africa are engaged in this more-or-less orthodox World War II, behind-the-scenes scientists are busily engaged in developing weapons of destruction against which there is no known defense.

The weapons are bugs.

Hessian flies, corn borers, Japanese beetles and other food-destroying insects are being studied as potential weapons in this ever-expanding conflict. It is no secret that Germany has devoted entire laboratories to the study of such pests.

Entomologist Leland O. Howard, author of "The Insect Menace," revealed after a visit to Germany that a laboratory in the Reich was devoted exclusively to study of the corn borer. But why? Germany doesn't grow enough corn to supply a Kentucky moonshine still. Maybe Herr Hitler's altruistic men of science just want to do a good turn for the corngrowers of Nebraska and Iowa. Maybe—but don't bet anything more valuable than a corncob on it.

The Hessian fly—get that name?—is another of Hitler's allies. About one-fourth the size of an ordinary house-fly, the Hessian fly destroys wheat. This fellow, hardy as winter wheat itself, holes in for the winter in wheat stubble and can withstand severe cold. Its hibernation is done in a shell which it builds around itself. In the spring, the Hessian wheat-eater comes out of its cocoon and mates. Each female lays about 250 eggs which hatch into maggots in a few days. These maggots destroy the young wheat by sucking its sap.

Another research laboratory in the Reich has made an extensive study of the virus of hoof-and-mouth disease,

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which destroys cattle and sheep. This laboratory is known to have stored large quantities of the virus. Of course, Germany raises some cattle and sheep and there is nothing sinister about its studying the hoof-and-mouth virus. But why store great quantities of the deadly stuff? The answer is: Weapons.

Those laboratories are arsenals. Almost every plant has some parasitic enemy. How many of such plant enemies are being cultivated in the Reich?

What if Hitler is unable to seize the fertile Ukrainian grain fields he is now struggling for? Unable to put the food to his own use, he could fix this "breadbasket of Europe" so that no one else could get a loaf of bread out of it.

What if the Nazi nabob should thus cut off his nose to spite his funny face, you ask, how would that so greatly affect us? Our grain fields are not too far away to be reached by his insect weapons, potentially more terrible than Stukas or incendiaries. They could be flown at night in unmarked planes and "dusted" over our grain-producing areas. Chances of detection would be slight, especially if the "dusting" should be done by Fifth Columnists. It would not be absolutely necessary to fly directly over the target areas. The pests could be released outside our boundaries in a strong in-blowing wind, and they would seek out our fields like homing pigeons.

The cotton boll weevil has been known to travel more than 1,000 miles by air. Some of the pests cultivated in aviation-minded Germany may do even better—or worse.

DR. E. PORTER FELT, well-known entomologist and director of the Bartlett Tree Research Laboratories, urges establishment of nation-wide observation posts for detection of crop-destroying insects being transported by the wind. Dr. Felt has been conducting an observation post atop New York City's Empire State Building in recent weeks, and during that time has collected more than thirty types of insects that were riding on the breezes.

The insects captured by Dr. Felt at his 1200-foot-high post are not Nazi invaders. They are mostly our own ornery breeds, plus a few naturalized immigrants. They were migrating from one fairly nearby spot to another, summer vacationing probably. But Dr. Felt's observations give some idea of what may be done in the way of transporting insects.

If worst comes to worst, would Hitler seek to destroy England's food supply at its sources instead of bothering about attacking transoceanic convoys? Nobody knows, perhaps including the depraved ex-paperhanger whom Prime Minister Churchill, in a choice bit of understatement, calls "that bad man."

But, if Hitler should send his microscopic armies to attack our grain fields and cattle ranges, as well as those of other allies of England, we could put a bothersome bug in his now oversize bonnet. The potato bug. This little devil would make short work of Germany's chief food crop.

The potato bug. Is that all we have to use against Hitler? You wonder. Have we no laboratories studying ways of making other counter-attacks? We have our Department of Agriculture entomologists studying how to combat insect menaces. Their knowledge *could* be used with reverse English. Remember the grape juice concentrates we used to buy during Prohibition? Remember the detailed cautions against what *not* to do, lest our grape juice—Heaven forbid!—become wine?

And so it would go. The entomologists of every nation would be working

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frenziedly to develop bigger and badder bugs. Nations would be sending their Trojan horseflies to sabotage the grub supplies of other nations, until—

Want to take another hitch in that belt?

Until—Well, you might get a faint idea by asking some of John Steinbeck's dustbowl refugees, or dig up your Bible, turn to Exodus, and read about the locust plague Moses wished on the Egyptians. (It might be noted, too, that Moses' bugs rode into Egypt on a wind. Just possibly, Hitler's bug army idea was inspired by Moses' locust plague, but Der Fuehrer wouldn't ever admit it, as Old Man Mose was not exactly a pure Aryan.) Anyway, those locusts didn't leave enough provender to feed a dyspeptic billygoat.

Then try to picture our own world after the insect armies have wiped out the food crops and the cattle and sheep have curled up and died of athlete's foot.

Starvation? No. Here's where Science blows its good puff. If Necessity is the mother of Invention, then Science must indeed be the obstetrician.

GET a load of this: On July 12, last, Professor A. C. Hardy, F. R. S., of University College, Hull, England, revealed that vast quantities of food are in the ocean waiting to be harvested. And that doesn't mean a lot of herring and such on the hoof. It's the food that the fish themselves, eat—*plankton*.

This plankton—I don't know why it's named plankton any more than I know why a scrod is called a scrod—is made up of countless numbers of tiny plants and animals floating in the sea. It is the main food of whales, as well as of the smallest fishes. The big fellows take on prodigious gulps of seawater, then squirt it back through their teeth, retaining the plankton. It is sort of a reverse procedure of your eating watermelon and getting rid of the seeds. The little guppies and sardines take their plankton more daintily.

Professor Hardy said plankton consists of fifty-nine percent protein, seven percent fat, twenty percent carbohydrates, five percent of a shell-like material, and a small quantity of ash. The animal type of plankton contains fifteen to twenty percent of oil. This type, he said, has a nutritive value equal to the best meat, and the plant type is the equivalent of rye bread.

The ocean abounds with plankton but it is more plentiful in polar than in tropical waters. Professor Hardy says it could be harvested economically in the lochs on the coast of Scotland.

Anybody who ever took on a bellyful of seawater after being bowled over by a big wave is going to be hard to convince that the stuff is palatable. But there you have it in black and white, and it comes from a scientist.

Seriously, the proposed harvesting of plankton seems to be more than a remote eventuality such as the utilization of uranium power. Indeed, it may be right at hand, and the vitamin- and calorie-infested waters of the Scottish lochs may spell defeat for dictator Adolf Hitler.

So don't scoff at the idea of bailing up a bucket of seawater for lunch. It'll be Victory Soup! (. . . —)

ALEXANDRE DUMAS—COOK

ALEXANDRE DUMAS, the famous author of such books as "The Count of Monte Cristo" and "The Three Musketeers," was also the author of a 1,200-page volume dealing with his favorite hobby—cooking. In his *Grand Dictionnaire de la Cuisine* are such odd recipes as Javanese kingfishers' nests, stuffed wild boar, kangaroo chops, and pickled elephants' feet.

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MYSTERY OF THE BLUE GOD— *by Harry Bates . . .* The figure stood before him like a man frozen, a fixed flood of dark blood spread over face and chest; fixed motionless in its gushing flow! Sharp as the crack of a million volts, Mickey understood. This was not Talbor himself. It was his death-visitation! The crisis of life was before him, the moment in which he must enter the mysterious laboratory of doom! Talbor, his creator, was dead!

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THE CHLOROPHYLL GIRL—by Frank Patton . . . NEW author (and good!) . . . NEW cover artist (he's great!) . . . NEW idea (the newest in years!) . . . "It's the end for man," said Sutton bitterly. "She was woman's *last hope, and she's a plant!* A plant, do you hear! When snow falls, she will die—and mankind will die. We have failed to create a new Eve."

THE FIEND OF NEW LONDON— *by Don Wilcox . . .* The vast audience sat, too chilled by fear to flee. But the monster was ignoring them. It plodded inexorably forward—toward the platform where Ben Gleed stood waiting, white-faced, tense, but grimly defiant. The monster bared ice-cube teeth, blinked red-glowing eyes. It waved its strangling, ribbon-like arms threateningly . . . and Ben Gleed, facing the fiend, swallowed hard. He'd called this thing a fake, but . . .

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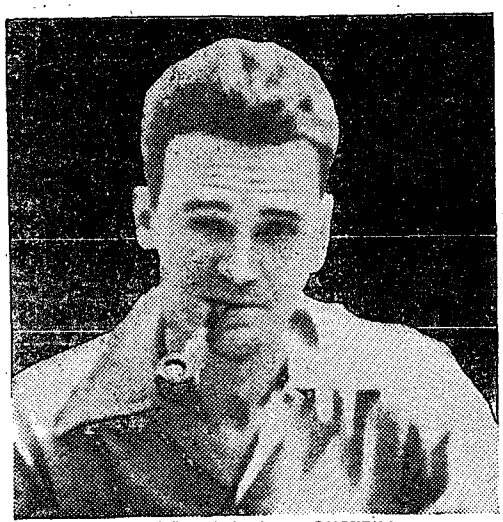

ROBERT W. GLUECKSTEIN

I WAS born, see! Much to the later regret of a lot of people—probably a lot of you readers after you read this, and I insist you do!

The fateful date was May 20th, 1917, making me, at this writing, 24 years extant. Everyone thought I was the cutest damn baby with my golden curly locks and beaming smile—I never cried! (An astounding fact noted by the scientists of that day with great awe and trembling.) And was therefore doted and feted by maw, paw, aunts and grandmaw to the point where I became an insufferable stinker—a characteristic which stinks—whoops—sticks to me to the present day. At the age of eighteen years, and some months I'd rather not recall, I awoke with a terrible hangover—(you know how it is when you've smoked too much with the herrings down the block)—my befogged and twisted mentality gave birth to the horrible idea that I should besiege editors with stuff which I would call humorous short articles just to confuse them.

Well, my depravity led me deeper and deeper into the realm of rejection slips and I found myself in dark places and holes in walls writing jokes. A few of them were sold to Colliers and the Saturday Evening Post by several cartoonists whom I plagued with my gags. Seeing these said slugs (the cartoonists) raking in all the dough for the gags aroused the mercenary nature in me. I decided to learn to draw myself and line my own pocket with 100% of the take. So I done it. Since I was my own teacher, and skipped a lot of school, I stunk as a cartoonist for many years (four to be exact) and maybe you still think I can't draw, huh? Well, it's still a free country and you're entitled to your opinions.

Furthermore, the editor asked for this autobiography—so shuddup! Anyhow I am sailing along peaceably making nice dough and so on when I am suddenly doing cartoons for Editor "Rap" for his Amazing Stories and Fantastic Adventures. This leads me to believe I have reached a pinnacle of some sort.

Like all cartoonists I am a character who is trustworthy, loyal, brave, kind and cheerful. I keep myself mentally awake, physically fit and morally straight and outside of that am stubborn, nasty-tempered, irritable, irascible, and really quite a card. In fact I occasionally make an awful ace of myself at parties of which I am the life of which.

I think I oughta insert somewhere along here that I was born, raised, and reside in Milwaukee—a fact which they'd sooner keep on the quiet, so don't mention it to anyone. The town would rather be famous for its beer than for such a distinguished, accomplished, intelligent son—.

Outside of taking a trip to Mars each summer in search of proper ideas for this magazine, I do little else with my time but eat and sleep and make Hildegarde merry. She is my wife so it's all right.

Cartooning, I find, is fun. You're your own boss, yuh sit at home all day cramped comfortably over a hot drawingboard and, (for exercise,) go down after the rejection slips which pour in with each mail. Make good resolves to do better next time. Do about 20 to 30 new gag ideas between eating and sleeping; draw up the few acceptances every now and then, cash the checks (you hope), and outside of that there is nothing to it—child's play really.

My only ambitions are to be the greatest cartoonist and humorous writer in the country, to make a comfortably cool million a year, and to keep on loving my wife. Maybe I have another ambition, but these will do for the present I'm sure.

I hope you all just simply love me too terribly and write Mr. "Rap" of this magazine and tell him he simply *must* buy more of my stuff.

ROBERT W. GLUECKSTEIN

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READER'S PAGE

SCIENCE OR FANTASY?

Sirs:

I have but one complaint. There is no science in your S.F. this month with the exception of your sunpower machines.

I like McCauley on covers. He's great!!! Ruth and Fuqua are good. Stories are always good.

Arthur Burmaster,
213 Clinton Ave.,
Albany, N. Y.

Our sister magazine, Amazing Stories, presents fiction with a strong science background. FANTASTIC ADVENTURES *presents true fantasy, which has a minimum of the gadget in its makeup. We suggest you read* Amazing *for your science fiction.*—ED.

McCAULEY ACCUSED!

Sirs:

I have read many science fiction and fantasy books and I think, among them all, you head the list. Your October issue was very good with the exception of "Thunder Over Washington." Brrr.

As usual, McCauley is very outstanding with excellent expressions for his characters on the cover. . . . BUT!! His inside illustration was copied from a book of "Flash Gordon On The Planet Mongo."!!!

Anthony Ahearn,
3170 Valhalla Drive,
The Bronx, N. Y.

Mr. McCauley's illustration was taken from a scene in the story, which was dictated to him by your editor himself. It was executed just as we ordered it, and was distinctly not a copy of any illustration from Flash Gordon. However, if a similarity does exist, we are sure that McCauley has done a much better job of executing the subject matter. He would be rather foolish to copy the art work of a comic magazine. You mention elsewhere in your letter that you are an artist. Therefore, you must understand that McCauley has not copied.—ED.

"Hah! Just as I suspected!"

MORE OF CABOT!

Sirs:

Commenting on your October issue, I would like to say I enjoyed "The Truthful Liar" very, very much. More of John York Cabot!

Arthur Schmidt, Jr.,
1793 Sedgwick Ave.,
Bronx, N. Y.

We certainly shall have more of Cabot! He has several yarns on our desk now that we are sure you'll like.—ED.

ONE PEEK—A GONER!

Sirs:

After reading *Amazing Stories,* I couldn't resist a peek into FANTASTIC ADVENTURES. One peek, and I was a goner!

In the July issue I thought "Goddess Of Fire" by E. R. Burroughs was grand. Then I read Powell's "Murdered—Yet Alive." That was perfectly scrumptious. I read the rest and each was rather super-super.

"Three Terrible People" by John York Cabot was my favorite. I laughed and felt sorry for poor Terrence Titwillow. He was so pathetically helpless with those three unpredictable maniacs he had dreamed up on the loose.

These "Mac Girl" covers are fine. They give a little extra "oomph."

Say, of what are these guys made that makes them "love-shy"? I quote Robert Byrde. "—a story that I term mushy love tripe—" I have been able to discover very little "love tripe" in any of the stories I've read in FANTASTIC ADVENTURES. Methinks the gentleman doth protest *too* much!

Roberta Gathright,
1234 E. Garfield,
Phoenix, Arizona.

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Name..... Age.....

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Now we have the feminine viewpoint on this subject, which ought to be worth something. After all, we men are no match for the girls when it comes to defining love.—ED.

"A HELLUVA LOT OF PEOPLE"

Sirs:

The majority, the great majority, of actifandom loves to shout "hack, hack" about all of Ziff-Davis' writers. If they would only stop to think. Here's my view on *Amazing Stories* and FANTASTIC ADVENTURES. Quite definitely both magazines cater to a more youthful type of reader. That's all right, because there are a great number of younger readers. The actifans growl angrily in their beards and yell "hack, hack." Well, your policy requires a certain type of story, and your writers produce. The great majority of stories in AS and FA are action, and more action. But it just happens there are a helluva lot of people who like that stuff. I am one of those.

Don Wilcox is the best writer you have. I am awaiting "Disciples of Destiny" with palpitating heart.

Harry Jenkins, Jr.,
Dixie Fantasy Federation.

Edgar Wallace was a "hack" by the standards you mention above. He wrote action for the movies, for the slicks, for book publishers. He wrote what his audience wanted. He was a great writer.

You are wrong about our catering to a younger reader. FANTASTIC ADVENTURES *is read by all ages, and less than 30% of them are under 25! Some of our fantasy yarns are worthy of comparison with the best works of the old masters, Poe, Stevenson, etc., because they are more advanced, modern and technically improved.*

Don Wilcox's great novel will appear in our companion magazine Amazing Stories.—ED.

ENTIRELY NEW LITERATURE

Sirs:

Put me down as the newest of your legion of fans. My contact with this truly fascinating business of pseudo-science literature has been, up to now, comparatively light. However, I intend to repair the omission with as much rapidity as possible.

Fantasy and science fiction stories seem to me to be something in the nature of an entirely new literature. It is a literature of ideas rather than formularized, age-old, twice-told tales of "boy meets girl" vintage, and it is because of this fact that it is genuinely thrilling to the rookie. Most of the fiction in this school seems to me to be overmelodramatic, perhaps in instances a bit crude when compared to the highly polished works of the slick paper magazine trained seals, but the quality that is fresh and new, all its own, is this quality of new concepts.

Anyway, it has me by the throat in a death grip. I suspect I shall remain a devotee for life.

I've been looking over the entire field of science fiction, due to my recent interest, and find your publication the most interesting.

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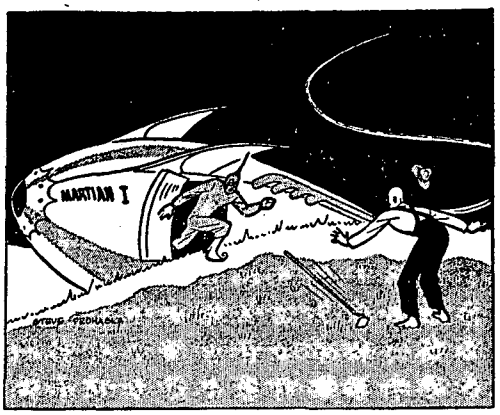
The make-up, the content, the art work, the features—particularly the cartoons—the friendly, chatty, gossip of your "Editor's Notebook", all seem to have produced a superior piece of magazine publication. That holds with all the rest of the Ziff-Davis publications. You boys certainly know what to put into a book to make it absorbing.

I was amazed to see Nat Schachner represented in your pulp with a long lead novel. Schachner, if I remember correctly, has invaded the book publishing world with one of the finest historical novels of the current season "By The Dim Lamps". Congratulations. His story, "The Return of Circe" was as good as they come—even in FANTASTIC ADVENTURES. Of the rest of the yarns, I thought Don Wilcox had the best thing with his "Secret League of Six" and next "Mr. Murchison's Ghost" by Robert Moore Williams. Tell Mr. Williams to continue writing to please himself—because in so doing, he pleases me too.

Ray Ellsworth,
127 Mayfair Drive,
Rochester, N. Y.

We are intensely pleased at your fine letter and its complimentary and pointed comments. We appreciate the appreciation you give to our work, because we do work hard to give to the magazine just what you say we have given to it. And we are constantly trying to give you stories that compare with the "polish" on the magazine. That is why you get stories like the Circe yarn by Schachner. Many writers of his calibre like to write for FANTASTIC ADVENTURES *because they love to write that kind of fiction, and we are the only market for it which can compare in quality with the slicks they usually write, but don't enjoy doing so well. We shall certainly continue to allow our writers to write to please themselves.*

Coming soon, by Don Wilcox, is "Rainbow of Death" which we believe to be Don's finest work since "Secret of the Stone Doll."—Ed.



"Where can I find Robert Ripley?"

THE HOUSE OF FIRE!

Flint slams the switch home! The current hums as it races through the cables, roars as it reaches the electrodes of the arc, splinters in a flashing crash as the arc flames! . . . Desperately Stargon tries to move the chair away. . . It lurches as he presses the controls . . . Flame bathes him in a hellish radiance! Can the egg-headed fiend escape the clutches of his own devilish contrivance in time to direct its heat rays earthward, destroying the Government's TNT plant? . . . Or will he be tricked by the men from earth and "burn in his own juice?" Told in the gripping style of Robert Moore Williams, this great story will have you gasping for breath! Don't miss top-notcher . . . THE HOUSE OF FIRE . . . one of the six outstanding stories in the big, thrill-packed

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GILFORD LIKED

Sirs:

For a new author, Gilford (whose yarn, "The Liquid Man" is an excellent example of good adventure-fantasy) has a style and technique which should carry him far. Let's have many more stories from his pen.

Though this take easily garnered first place, the number 2 and 3 spots were rather hotly contested. "Miracle At Dunkirk" and "The Man Who Saw Through Time" tying for second place.

Those special articles seem better in each successive issues. "Quackery In The Heavens" being a particularly good one. The other features, such as "Romance Of The Elements," "The Editor's Notebook" and the cartoons, remain at a consistently high level.

Bill Stoy,
140-92 Burden Crescent,
Jamaica, N. Y.

As for Mr. Gilford, the following letter will be of interest to you.—Ed.

HEY, YOU, PAUL CARTER!

Sirs:

In the October issue of your magazine, I came across an interesting paragraph; I had the amazing experience of discovering that there was some doubt as to my being a real person. To Mr. Paul Carter of Blackfoot, Idaho, let me say that I am not—luckily for myself—a mere pen name with no existence in three dimensions.

I had the good fortune of being represented by "The Liquid Man" in the September issue of Fantastic Adventures, and sincerely hope that will not be the last. Come that as it may, I trust in, and am confident of, the continued success of Fantastic Adventures and Amazing Stories as the finest pair in the field of science fiction.

C. Bernard Gilford,
540 East 56th Street,
Kansas City, Mo.

Thanks, Mr. Gilford, and now, quite abjectly, we want to apologize for using your name wrongly. We called you "Bernard C. Gilford" and your manuscript plainly carries it as "C. Bernard Gilford" as does your letter. Your next story—yes, we hope too that there'll be another—will carry it correctly.—Ed.

NUTS TO YOU . . . !

Sirs:

I just want to say *nuts* to Mr. V. Scullin, who says: "I enter a request for less detective stories and less McGivern humor." Where do you get that "detective" stuff? I haven't seen any, at least not the way you mean. Is it McGivern or humor you don't like. Either way, you're screwy.

Lionel Batty, Jr.,
1485 N. Morningside Dr., N.E.,
Atlanta, Ga.

So much for you, Mr. Vincent (Louie) Scullin! And thassall for this month, readers!—Ed.

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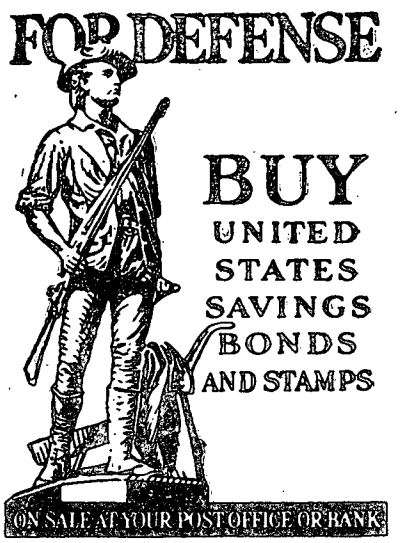

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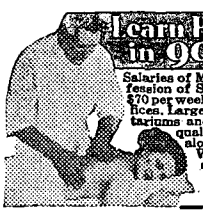

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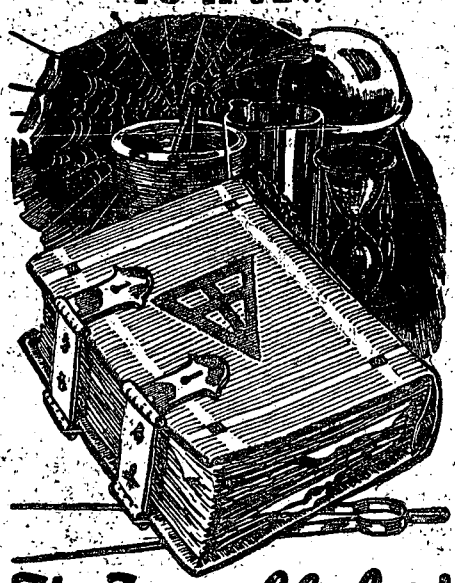

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CORRESPONDENCE CORNER

Marvin Dorf, 3038 Colona Street, Philadelphia, Pa., wishes to buy back date AMAZING STORIES and other science fiction magazines. He would also like to have pen pals interested in science. . . . Benny Russell, 408 Lake Cliff Drive, Dallas, Texas, would like to correspond with girls about 18 years of age interested in traveling, convertibles, and dancing. He is 20. . . . C. Held, 494 Carlton Street, Buffalo, N Y., has complete files of scientific and weird fiction magazines which he would like to sell. . . . Bill Watson, 14, 1299 California Street, San Francisco, Calif., would like some foreign pen pals. . . . Robert R. Franck, 1530 Leimert Blvd., Oakland, California, desires to hear from any science fiction magazine fan in the East Bay who wishes to join a swell club. . . . Raymond Washington, Jr., Live Oak, Florida, would like all Florida fans to contact him immediately for the formation of a state-wide S-F club called "Fantasy Fans of Florida." Headquarters will be in Live Oak and if a sufficient number of fans are interested there will be booster stickers, and a fan-mag called "Scientifun" later on. . . . Mildred Lambert, 2627 Webster Avenue, Bronx, N. Y., 20 years old and interested in science, stamp collecting, model ship building, and reading SF magazines—would like correspondents from all over the world. . . . Fred DeBlon, 112 Braun Avenue, Hi. Park, New Brunswick, N. J., is interested in Edgar Rice Burroughs stories and would like to get as much of his writings as he can. . . . Louise Manfred, 532 23rd Street, Union City, N. J., is anxious to correspond with pen pals of either sex. He is 20. . . . N. Keel, 234 Genessee Street, Buffalo, N. Y., has a large stock of magazines for sale; send lists. . . . Tom Ludowitz 2310 Virginia, Everett, Washington, has the Venus novels by Burroughs and many other books by the same author. . . . Mrs. LaVerne Waddell, 4 Independent Street, Carnegie, Pa., is a post mark collector in need of some "exchangers." . . . S. Ritter, 1160 Simpson Street, N. Y. C., has about 55 SF and fantasy magazines he'd like to trade for others or for books of history or biography. He would also like to hear from ardent readers of history and biography. . . . Pvt. Paul B. Segal, Co. M., 101st Infantry (R), A.P.O. 26, Camp Edwards, Mass., would like to correspond with everyone from everywhere, especially soldiers at different posts. He is interested in exchanging stamps and regimental insignia and will send a snapshot to all interested enough to write. . . .

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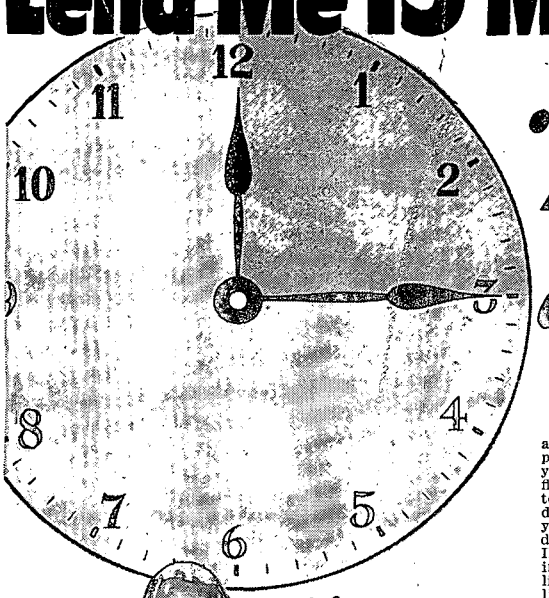
..and I'll prove I can make you a NEW MAN



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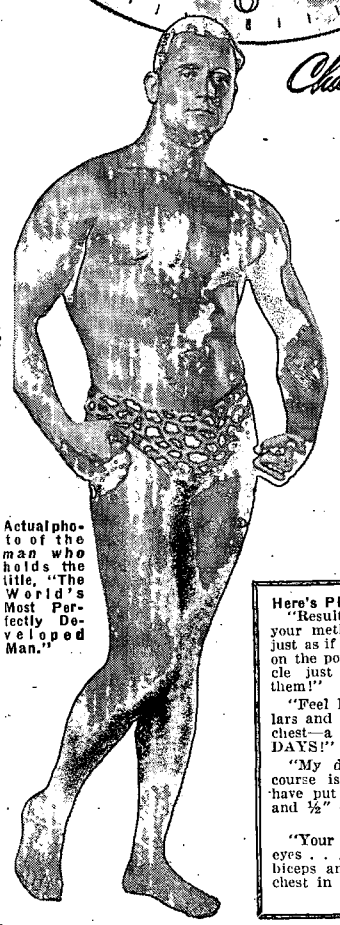

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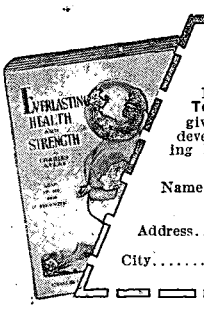

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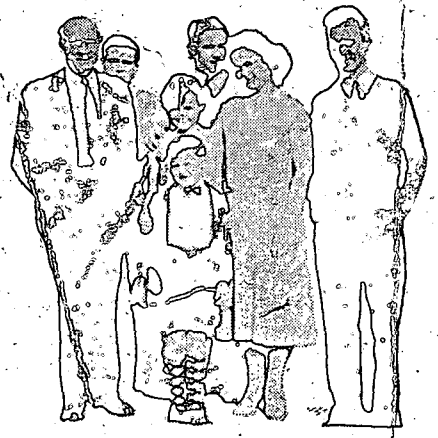

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